INCREDIBLE FREE GIFT!

GIANT COMIC SAMPLER

OVER 50 PAGES OF STRIP!

BURSTING WITH GREAT COMICS!

COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • MOVIES • TV • GAMES

COMIC HEROES

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THOR

- HIS GREATEST ENEMIES
- HIS BIGGEST BATTLES
- HIS SECRET ORIGIN

+ INSIDE THE NEW FILM
THOR: THE DARK WORLD

X-CLUSIVE INTERVIEW!
BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS ON BATTLE OF THE ATOM

PLUS!

SUPER MOVIE PREVIEW 2014

KICK-ASS 2, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, AVENGERS 2 + LOADS MORE!

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

ALSO THIS ISSUE:

HOWARD THE DUCK • THE CROW
DOCTOR STRANGE • GODZILLA • V FOR VENDETTA
AND ROCK GOD TURNED COMIC WRITER GERARD WAY

Future

MOTHER'S BASEMENT

INSIDE!

Comic Heroes Sep/Oct 2013

FEATURES

14 THOR
There are awesome superheroes, and then there's Thor: we've met none mightier.

28 AL EWING
The *2000 AD* regular swaps Mega-City One for Earth's Mightiest Heroes.

34 TITAN COMICS
Introducing: a new British comic start up! We talk to the man behind it, Nick Landau.

40 BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS
The current Big Daddy of the X-world on new crossover *Battle Of The Atom*.

44 JOE HILL
As one door closes – *Locke & Key* – another one opens for the acclaimed horror scribe...

52 JAMES STOKOE
The man behind *Godzilla: Half Century War* on monsters, metabolism and angry orcs.

56 SUPERHERO MOVIES
Why we love them, what their problem is – and we preview next year's big offerings.

62 THE FABULOUS KILLJOYS
Looks like My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way's got another hit on his hands.

66 HOWARD THE DUCK
We look at the amazing Steve Gerber, and the duck that defined him. Plus: Phil Winslade!

78 DAVID LLOYD
The *V For Vendetta* artist talks masks, misconceptions and the digital future.

REGULARS

10 SHAPERS OF WORLDS
Exclusive interviews with *The Crow*'s James O'Barr and the great Harlan Ellison.

50 HIDDEN GEMS
So Beautiful And So Dangerous – Angus McKie's glorious *Heavy Metal* opus.

74 JUDGE JAMES
In the dock: *Spider-Man*'s 'Clone Saga'.

86 WORLD OF COMICS
Marc-Antoine Mathieu comes to the UK at last: his work is once seen, never forgotten.

104 WORLD'S FINEST
The weird, wonderful world of *Dr Strange* and *Howard The Duck* artist Frank Brunner.

DEPARTMENTS

04 HEAT VISION
It's a San Diego Comic-Con special!

91 REVIEWS
The best new comics reviewed and rated!

112 SUBSCRIBE
Save heaped helpings of precious £££s – and get the mag delivered to your door!

114 BIG ISSUES
Walt Simonson introduces: Beta Ray Bill!

CULTURE CLASH

So the big question is, what exactly are comic books for these days? Are they mainstream entertainment, or a totally specialist interest? Are they here to inspire movies and TV shows mainly – a cheap way for the Big Boys to try out an IP, see if it has legs – or a unique art form, with its own traditions and opportunities? We're puzzled, and this issue contains strong arguments for both camps.

On the comic/movie convergence front, the San Diego Comic-Con show report that dominates Heat Vision would seem to indicate a world where we've been colonised by the movie industry. But from the 'unique art form' camp, the work of French artist Marc-Antoine Mathieu says, "Try copying this, *fan de cinéma* – because I think you'll find you can't."

Naturally, here at *Comic Heroes* we think *both* sides are just as valid – comics as culture versus comics as art form – and to that end we're rethinking the magazine next issue. It'll be bigger with even more pages, giving us room to add new sections on foreign comics and the like, as well as on the films and TV shows and games now spinning out of our world. In other words, *Comic Heroes* will be *better*. And surely nobody could argue with that?

Matt Bielby,
Editor

BONUS: SIDEKICK COMIC SAMPLER!
52 massive pages long, and heaving with great comic strip. This time around we've got brand new superhero strips like *Death Sentence*, fantastical comedies like *It Came!* and *Thrud*, plus serious social commentary in *March: Book One* and a nice chunk of a genuine comic book classic: Jack Katz's *The First Kingdom*.

SHOCK & AWE

Our boys pick the most awesome page they've ever seen in comics...

MIKE PERKINS

Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D by Steranko is truly groundbreaking work, but still steeped in the traditions of Kirby. I could pick the famous 4pp spread, or the time he bursts in on a motorbike. But there are loads.

MARK MITCHELL

Massimo Belardinelli's 'Biogs' living spaceship in a *2000 AD Dan Dare* spread rocked my world: it's the weirdest thing, part jellyfish, part coral reef, and all hungry. Weird and astonishing in equal measure.

JAMES LOVEGROVE

Almost every page of Alex Ross's art in *Marvels* generates awe, but one in particular – when the X-Men appear in #2, lit up crimson by Cyclops' glowing visor – is downright eerie, haunting and, well, uncanny.

PAUL GRAVETT

Your gob can't get more smacked than it would by opening Kirby's *New Gods* to one of his widescreen vistas; I liked Metron in his Mobius Chair, dwarfed by giant aliens turned to stone in their failed attempts to locate The Source.

STEPHEN JEWELL

John Byrne and Terry Austin's shot in *Uncanny X-Men* #142's 'Days Of Future Past', where a fastballing Wolverine is vaporised in mid-air by a Sentinel, sent shivers down my not-so-adamantium spine when I first saw it.

MATT BIELBY

Comics are most awesome when they build up to some huge, vital splash page: Kirby did many, Miller too, but I remember being most rocked by the end of *Amazing Spider-Man* #121: 'The Night Gwen Stacy Died'.

HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FOR ALL THINGS COMICS!

That '70s Show

Fewer than 150 people made it to the initial event back in 1970, but San Diego Comic-Con has grown a little since – and crazily so, since it got co-opted by the film industry. **By Dave Bradley, Rich Edwards and Matt Bielby**

Away from the main stages, there was plenty to keep fans busy.

Jim Lee rocks up in a flashy Batmobile.

There's nothing quite like the San Diego Comic-Con International; across the world, other conventions may rival or even beat it for numbers – Comiket in Tokyo gets more people; so does Lucca Comics and Games in Italy, and the world's biggest, Angoulême International Comics Festival in France – but for a 'where's comics culture at?' snapshot San Diego is unrivalled.

What started as San Diego's Golden State Comic-Minicon in 1970 has now grown to a size where it threatens to burst the 57,000sqm San Diego Convention Centre every year (the suggestion it might move to larger premises in another city has forced the place to expand for 2016), with tickets for the past couple of years totally selling out in about an hour and a half. It's that the movie and TV industries have so colonised the world of comics that's been responsible for San Diego's massive expansion in recent years, of course – and that you're now as likely to bump into a major movie star there as you are a mid-list Marvel artist.

In the '90s, SDCC tended to attract 30-40,000 people, but then it leapt: to 70,000 by 2003, breaking 100,000 two years later, and the place has been at capacity ever since. This year TV shows *Supernatural*, *Breaking Bad*, *Doctor Who*, *Under The Dome* and *Sons Of Anarchy* each held events, with plenty of stars and creators in attendance – and that was just on the Sunday!

Bigger news yet came from a Marvel Studios panel that covered *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*, *Thor: The Dark World*, *Captain America: Winter Soldier* and *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, plus those for *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, *Amazing Spider-Man 2*, the *Man Of Steel* sequel and more, all jostling for position with panels for everything from *The Walking Dead* to *Game Of Thrones*, *The Hunger Games* to *The Big Bang Theory*.

This year, Dave Bradley and Rich Edwards from *SFX* and *Comic Heroes* were amongst the 130,000 or so attending. But what did they make of it all? We thought it only polite to ask...

Comic Heroes: How did this year's event compare to others you've been to?

Dave Bradley: Comics-based movies and TV ruled the roost again this year. *The Walking Dead* had a huge presence, and the main Hall H stage on Saturday was dominated by Marvel and DC characters. When Fox brought out every single X-actor from *Days Of Future Past* they basically won Comic-Con 2013.

For me, though, it felt slightly quieter than in previous years. There were few 'phenomena' »

"You're as likely to bump into a movie star as you are an artist"

HEAT VISION

Trinity War hits *Justice League Of America* #6.

Models of your favourite characters, small and large.

there this time, no folk camping out for days to see a glimpse of *Twilight* or whatever – the closest we got to that was a small overnight line for *Doctor Who*.

Richard Edwards: I'd agree that X-Men won Comic-Con this year, effectively blowing Marvel Studios out of the water – even flying in the entire cast of *Guardians Of The Galaxy* couldn't compare to all those mutants on one stage. But interestingly, Warner/DC bagged itself just as many headlines by announcing its *Superman/Batman* movie crossover – it shows you don't always need to go to the effort of jetting in talent to make the news.

I'd disagree with Dave slightly about whether it felt quieter though. Certainly the Thursday and Friday programmes were rather weaker than they have been in recent years, but – following a few Saturday night show-stealers from Marvel in recent years – you got the sense that this time the studios had decided that Saturday was where the big headlines were at and didn't want to be left out. That meant they crowded most of the big hitters into one packed day.

Indeed, 'Super Saturday' was as big as any day I can remember at Comic-Con, with X-Men, *The Hunger Games*, Tom Cruise, Godzilla, the *Superman/Batman* announcement, *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes*, *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, *Captain America*, Tom Hiddleston as Loki and the reveal of the *Avengers 2* title all appearing on the Hall H stage. The atmosphere in there was electric. Saturday was so big this year that I think the trend will continue at future Cons. (I've heard from other people, too, that the queues for Saturday were already vast at 5am, with people camping out all night to get into the hot ticket event that the Marvel panel has become.)

Also, the event outside the Convention Center feels like it's spreading – I reckon these days you could head to San Diego without a Comic-Con badge and still find plenty to do.

CH: Increasingly San Diego feels like a genre media event with a comic elements tacked on...

DB: Sure, the big halls ring with the sound of new trailers and big screen bombast. But the thing is, if you took away all the movies and TV this would still be America's largest public comic convention.

I did hear Tommy Lee Edwards lamenting that he sold fewer comics and signed fewer autographs than in previous years though, so perhaps the amount of business that takes place is shrinking. But Marvel, Dark Horse and DC continue to have the biggest stands and they showcase art as much as movie props; plus, walk away from those zones to the outer limits of the exhibition hall and Artists' Alley seems as crowded as ever, so the event is not struggling to attract comic creators.

RE: 'San Diego Media-Con' would be a more accurate description, though I think that even as comics themselves slip down the pecking order, they're still a crucial part of the event's DNA – just look at the number of superhero movies and TV shows that are on display here. You could argue that Hollywood has taken over, but the geek dollar is huge at the moment. Besides with DC and Marvel both owned by

All-action *Trinity War* in *Justice League* #22.
Cosplay? Movie prop? It's getting hard to tell!
Superman: by Aardman and Kia!
75 YEARS

movie companies, it's difficult to know these days where comics end and films begin anyway.

CH: Of the Big Two, Marvel and DC, which had the best show?
DB: On the comics side of things, my perception is that DC was bigger. They kicked off the event itself with a celebration of their WeCanBeHeroes charity campaign, in which Kia cars were themed with DC comic art in aid of African famine relief – we watched Jim Lee put the finishing touches to a Justice League themed Sorento – and then during the weekend they had the likes of Geoff Johns, Dan DiDio, J Michael Straczynski and more all presenting, or giving interviews, on a stand which drew crowds with its display of Superman costumes (part of the 75th anniversary celebrations).

But when it comes to live action, Marvel had Joss Whedon announce that Avengers 2 would be *Age Of Ultron* – and fans' heads exploded. They certainly won the bigger headlines, I'd say.
RE: Just talking movies, I thought DC got the best value for money for a mile, creating loads of buzz by simply announcing the *Superman/Batman* team-up and revealing a logo – Marvel's similar efforts with the *Age Of Ultron* title reveal felt like something of an anti-climax after everything else, suggesting that Superman and Batman are still the biggest deal in comic-book franchises, despite the success of the Avengers.

But Marvel still proved itself to be a canny operator – Tom Hiddleston owned Hall H in his live appearance as Loki, the *Captain America* panel did just about enough to satisfy, and the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* cast and footage did a very important job in building buzz about a franchise that has never really been in the public eye.

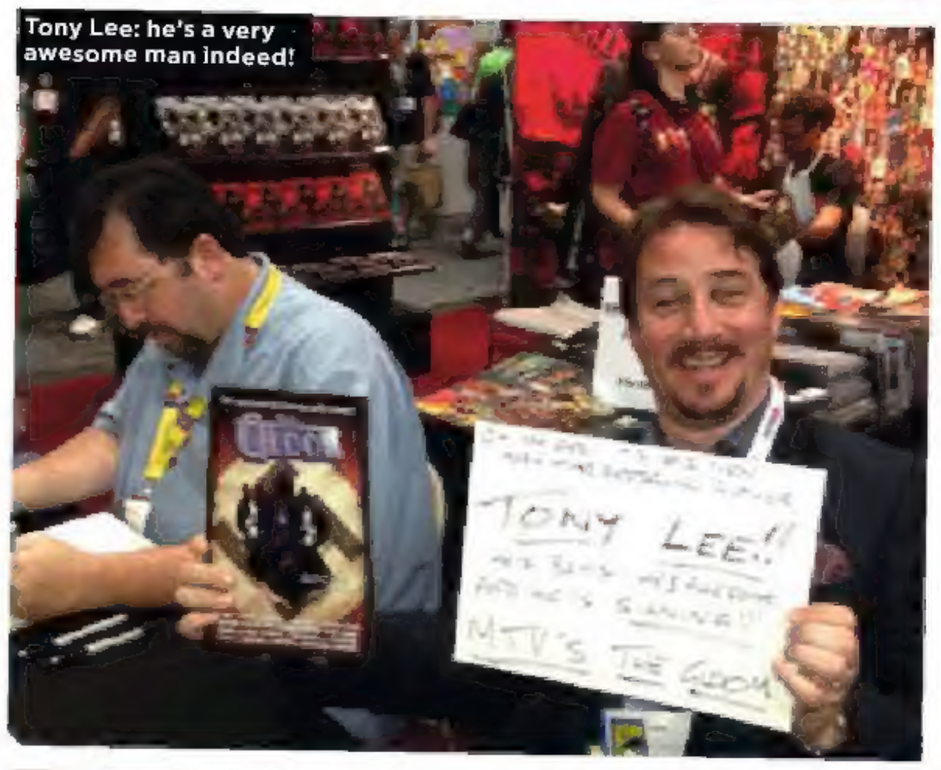
CH: And of the smaller publishers, who really made their presence felt?
DB: Dark Horse and Skybound always have a sizeable presence and this year was no different; and, smaller still, you had the likes of Tim Bradstreet there with a RAW booth, and teams like Girl Genius seemed to be continually busy.

2000 AD were doing good business with their stand near the central isle, but also announced that they're throwing their weight officially behind the campaign to make a *Dredd* movie sequel. The thing that always wows me at Comic-Con is that even tiny independently published comics also jostle for space, and it gives the event an incredible vibrancy and can-do attitude.

They'd shaken up the organisation of the exhibit hall a little bit this year so that bigger things like the Hyundai-sponsored *Walking Dead* house were out towards the edges too, so there was no excuse for people to avoid the fringe areas where one-man-bands and old school comic dealers still seem to flourish.

CH: What news stories or events were people really buzzing about?
DB: The big news from IDW was that their time with *Doctor Who* is coming to an end. Tony Lee will finish the final four-part arc story – fitting, since he began IDW's run back in the day – and then Paul Cornell will pen a 50th »

HEAT VISION



anniversary story for them, before it moves on to another publisher, as yet unknown!

CH: And what did you personally find most exciting?

RE: The *X-Men: Days Of Future Past* cast appearing together. Getting all of those stars together on one stage was one spectacular piece of logistical planning, and Fox backed it up with a wonderful trailer. In a 2014 packed with superhero movies, my gut says this will be the best. Also, being in the same room as Harrison Ford for a press conference was pretty awesome.

CH: What got the loudest cheer?

RE: *Doctor Who* – I can still feel the ringing in my ears. And Karen Gillan revealing she's shaved her head to play Nebula in *Guardians Of The Galaxy* got a big response too.

CH: Of the folk you met, who charmed your socks off?

DB: Jamie Foxx was incredibly articulate about bringing Electro to life in the new *Spider-Man* movie, opening up about his own adoption and youthful relationships, and how that fed into the character.

In comics, I've never met Wendy and Richard Pini of *ElfQuest* fame before, despite them having over 30 years in the business. They were very generous with their time on the Dark Horse stand, and obviously still love hanging out with comics fans and creators after all these years. Finally, a shout out to Tony Lee, who was there signing *The Gloom* amongst other things, who seems to be the busiest Brit in comics but always finds the time to hang out with us.

RE: Jennifer Lawrence is a total star – funny and self-deprecating. I hope Hollywood doesn't knock it out of her and turn her into another bland actor-automoton. And I really enjoyed talking to Mike Johnson about *Star Trek* comics.

CH: Based on this show alone, what characters or creators should we really be looking out for?

RE: *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. This time last year the general public wouldn't have known the name. The footage they showed at Comic-Con, though, made me think it's going to be massive – a fun, slightly bonkers space opera, *Star Wars* with snark. And I now really do believe that a raccoon can be an action hero.

Want to attend the next San Diego Comic-Con International, in July 2014? Then get a wriggle on – hotel availability is already disastrous!

FROM THE MAKERS OF SFX MAGAZINE

COMIC HEROES

Future Publishing Ltd: 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Email: comicheroes@futurenet.com
Web: www.comicheroesmagazine.com

EDITORIAL

Editor: Matt Bielby
matt.bielby@futurenet.com
Art Editor: Mark Mitchell
mark.mitchell@futurenet.com
Production Editor: Andrea Ball
andrea.ball@futurenet.com
***SFX* Editor-in-Chief:** Dave Bradley
david.bradley@futurenet.com
***SFX* Art Editor:** Jonathan Coates
jonathan.coates@futurenet.com

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS

David Currie, Paul Gravett, Stephen Jewell, James Lovegrove, Michael Molcher, Mike Perkins

ADDITIONAL LAYOUT

Mark Critchell, Kate McDonnell

Thor wallet image © Marvel Comics

Matt would like to thank: Dave Bradley and Rich Edwards for their thoughts on San Diego; Mike Perkins for his thoughts on inking; Jack Kirby for the power and the glory.

ADVERTISING

Advertising Manager: Adrian Hill
01225 442244, adrian.hill@futurenet.com
Sales Director: Nick Weatherall
020 7042 4155, nick.weatherall@futurenet.com
Digital Ad Manager: Andrew Church
020 7042 4237, andrew.church@futurenet.com

MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Group Marketing Manager: Sam Wight
020 7042 4061, sam.wight@futurenet.com
Senior Marketing Executive: Tilly Michell
020 7042 4077, tilly.michell@futurenet.com
Marketing Executive: Antonella Matia
020 7042 4025, antonella.matia@futurenet.com
Direct Marketing: Adam Jones
adam.jones@futurenet.com

CIRCULATION AND LICENSING

Trade Marketing Manager: Jonathan Beeson
jonathan.beeson@futurenet.com
International Export Account Manager: Michael Peacock
+44(0)1225 732316, michael.peacock@futurenet.com
Licensing And Syndication Director: Regina Erak
regina.erak@futurenet.com
Head of Circulation: James Whitaker
james.whitaker@futurenet.com

PRINT AND PRODUCTION

Production Controller: Marie Quilter
marie.quilter@futurenet.com
Paper Controller: Lorraine Rees
lorraine.rees@futurenet.com
Advertising Production Coordinator: Alaina Henderson
alaina.henderson@futurenet.com

THE SENIOR PARTNERS

Creative Director: Bob Abbott
Editorial Director: Jim Douglas
Deputy MD, Film & Games: Clair Porteous

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Phone our UK hotline on: 0870 837 4722
Subscribe online at: www.comicheroesmagazine.com

NEXT COMIC HEROES ON SALE 18 October 2013

MAGAZINE PRINTED IN THE UK BY William Gibbons on behalf of Future

DISTRIBUTED IN THE UK BY Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT **Tel** 020 7429 4000

OVERSEAS DISTRIBUTION BY Future Publishing Ltd, Bath **Tel:** +44 (0)1225 442244

The Dark Elves? *Here?*

Something exciting happened recently when researching this issue's *Thor* feature. Now, we need little excuse to re-read the work of Walt Simonson – especially when one of his storylines makes up the backbone of the upcoming *Thor: The Dark World* movie – but imagine our surprise when (bloody hell!) we discovered much of the action takes place in the Cotswolds, a sleepy part of posh rural England just north of *Comic Heroes*' home in Bath. Or, as WS has it in *Thor* #347: "A land of wooded hills and shadowed valleys where something almost Medieval still holds the countryside in thrall... and the ancient and powerful realm of Faerie is hidden from the sight of man only by his own blindness." Brrr!

Future produces high-quality multimedia products which reach our audiences online, on mobile and in print. Future attracts over 50 million consumers to its brands every month across five core sectors: Technology, Entertainment, Music, Creative and Sports & Auto. We export and license our publications.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR). www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Mark Wood
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Graham Harding
Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

© Future Publishing Limited 2013. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used or reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. The registered office of Future Publishing Limited is at Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW. All information contained in this magazine is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. Readers are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this magazine. If you submit unsolicited material to us, you automatically grant Future a licence to publish your submission, in whole or in part, in all editions of the magazine, including licensed editions worldwide and in any physical or digital format throughout the world. Any material you submit is sent at your risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents or subcontractors shall be liable for loss or damage. And if you bothered reading that, you're probably now angrier than Banner confronted by Mr McGee.

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C007184

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

Facebook.com/ComicHeroes
We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from well managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. Future Publishing and its paper suppliers have been independently certified in accordance with the rules of the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). Mighty!

"What profiteth a man to keep his throne if he shall lose – a universe?"

THE VIEW FROM A BOARD

Mike Perkins prefers to ink himself – though he still feels the need to embellish other artist's pencils now and again. (It's a confusing thing.)

The writer, director and sometime actor Kevin Smith has long been the bane of every inker's existence – and why? A simple, throwaway line in *Chasing Amy*, that's all. Sure, it's a film I enjoy – but that I've learned to loath on a certain level too. The reason: at every convention these days you'll get some grinning joker, thinking they're the most original comedian on the block, repeating Smith's infuriating line, 'Oh, so you're a tracer', should you dare to mention that you've inked another artist's pencils.

Now, I'm considered a nice guy – someone who tries to get along with fans and creators alike – but I swear each time I want to kick the little idiot in the bollocks!

Harsh? Maybe. But it's a fact that a lot of people out there don't have an inkling about inking – and it's not just the fans. When I was at CrossGen, head honcho Mark Alessi couldn't get it straight in his head just what an inker did. Sure, he knew one was needed in order for a polished product to be published, but it was almost as if he saw it as just that: part of a production process.

And, in a way, I guess that's exactly what it originally was, way back in the '30s at the beginning of the American comics industry. To manage the workload, comic art production was broken down into four distinct disciplines: pencilling, inking, colouring and lettering. Each task was tackled by a different artist, a specialist in his field – or, at least, someone who could turn the work around to an acceptable standard, and on time. It was a production line comparable to that used in the automobile industry, albeit on a smaller scale, and it's an approach still used to this day.

LINE OF BEAUTY

To the general reading public the writer tells the story, the penciller is the guy who provides all the artwork, what the colourist contributes is obvious and the letterer ditto – but inking remains a murky art. What exactly does the poor guy do? Aside from the obvious 'he turns the pencil lines black, so they're bold enough to print from', he's actually the co-artist in most instances, and his efforts can totally make or break a penciller's work.

His is the finished artwork you see printed there on the page, after all, with the pencils usually buried somewhere well beneath it. Even at the most basic level, an inker adds depth to the art by introducing a variety of line weights – a poor swish of the brush can add an extra 20lb to a character's arse, for instance, which is not something most of the X-Women (or their fans!) would appreciate most of the time.

The inker can also enhance the artwork in other ways. With the application of textures, or a heavier use of blacks, he can modify the atmosphere of a story radically – and without changing anything the penciller did at all. You want slick, sleek and smooth? No problem – he gets out the brush and pens. You'd prefer it rough and jagged? Let me grab my crow-quills and White Out and I'll sort that for you.

In simple terms an inker is often – and a little gratingly – compared to the bass player or, more appropriately, the cinematographer of the team. And surely neither of those professionals would be very happy being referred to as their equivalent of a 'tracer'. So watch it, Smart Alec! Turns out even I can't stand to hear that four times in one day.

Though he's had the distinct pleasure of being inked by some of the best in the business, Mike Perkins never felt it was quite his artwork there on the printed page.

"A lot of people out there don't have an inkling about inking – and it's not just the fans"

KILLER INK

A couple of years back I wrote a chapter on inking for Andy Schmidt's book, *The Insider's Guide To Creating Comics And Graphic Novels*, and I serialised that chapter over on my blog, alongside examples of the inking process. You can follow these links:
http://perkyposts.blogspot.com/2010/08/insider-guide-1.html
http://perkyposts.blogspot.com/2010/08/insider-guide-2.html
http://perkyposts.blogspot.com/2010/08/insider-guide-3.html

Survival instinct

Harlan Ellison

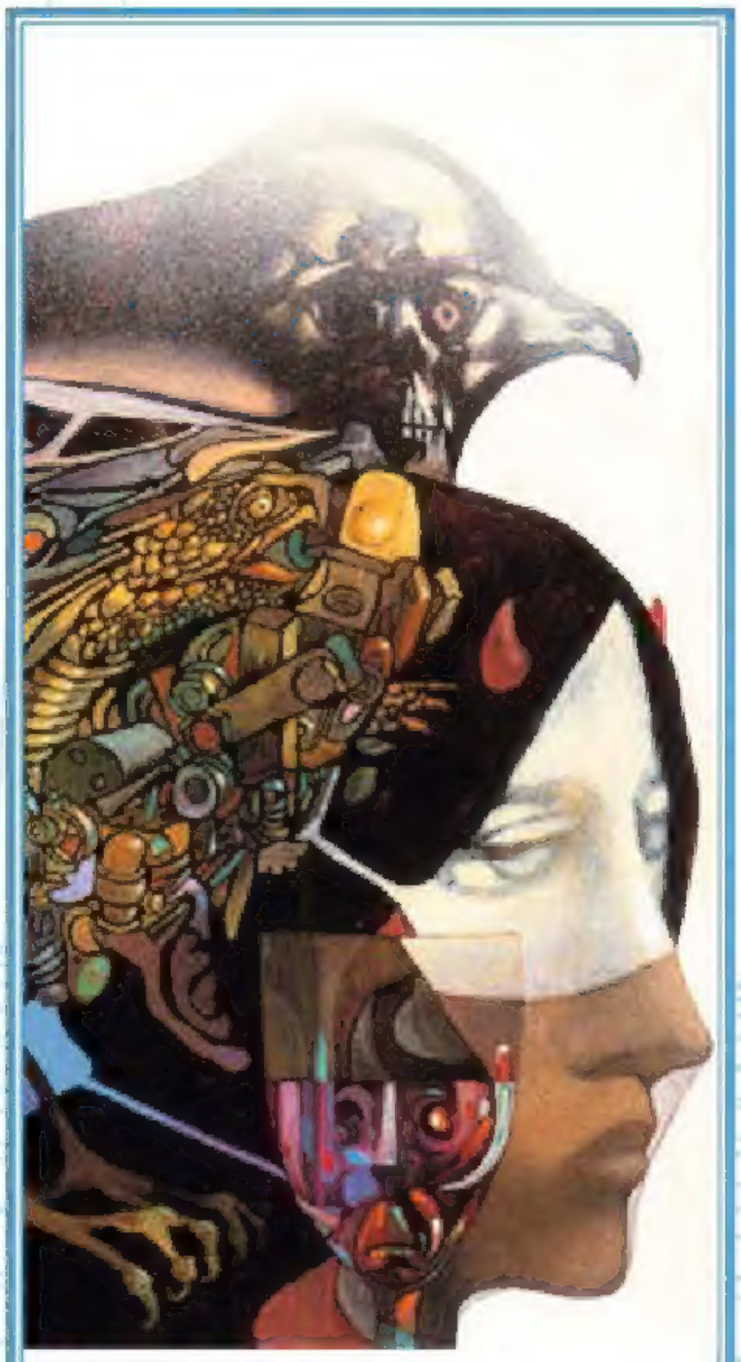
Though he's written precious few novels, Harlan Ellison is one of science fiction's true giants; now he caps an illustrious career with a new far future graphic novel adventure that pays tribute to Dumas, Kurosawa and more.

By Stephen Jewell

From great TV episodes – including perhaps the most celebrated *Star Trek* story ever, 'The City On The Edge Of Forever', and classic *Outer Limits* episode 'Demon With A Glass Hand' – to hundreds of striking short stories, Harlan Ellison has long been one of the more distinctive voices in science fiction. But on top of his having written or edited getting on for 100 books, 25 or so film or TV scripts and thousands of essays and short stories over the past 50 or so years, the California-based author has made numerous significant contributions to the comics industry too, beginning with a letter to the editor from the teenage Harlan that was printed in the pages of *Real Fact Comics* #6 in 1947.

In the early '70s, however, he got more involved, providing plots for issues of *Batman*, *Incredible Hulk* and *Avengers*, and since then much of his prose fiction has been turned into comics by other hands. Now, however, Vertigo has published the 79-year-old's first original graphic novel, *7 Against Chaos*, which sees him team up with two pals, *Concrete* artist Paul Chadwick and colourist Ken Steacy.

Steacy illustrated the adaptations of Ellison's short stories that first appeared in *Epic Illustrated* before being collected by Comico as *Night Of The Enemy* in 1987, and the two have known each other ever since. Initially conceived in the '90s as an animated film, Ellison now believes that *7 Against Chaos*' ambitious scope and phantasmagoric vision of a far-flung future was just too far ahead of its time for the budgets and technology of that pre-CGI era.



Deathbird Stories by Leo and Diane Dillon

BORN CLEVELAND, OHIO
HIGH STAR TREK
NOW 7 AGAINST CHAOS
MORE harlanellison.com

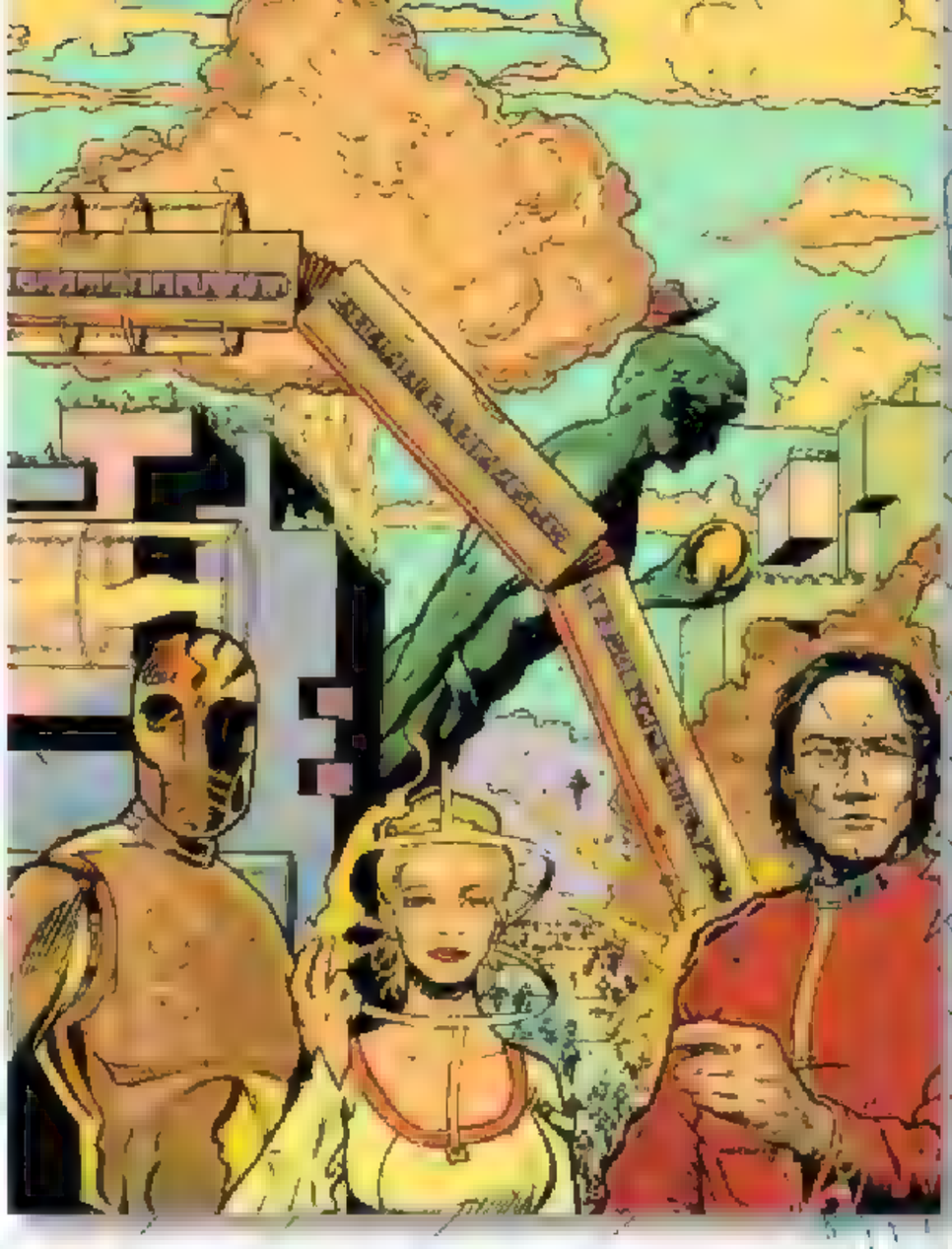
"When Dan Didio from DC approached me about 10 years ago and asked, 'Do you have anything in the hopper for a big story?', I immediately said, 'What about *7 Against Chaos*?'" he tells *Comic Heroes*. "He took to it straight away, and Paul and Ken came on board immediately, so it's been the three of us from the get-go.

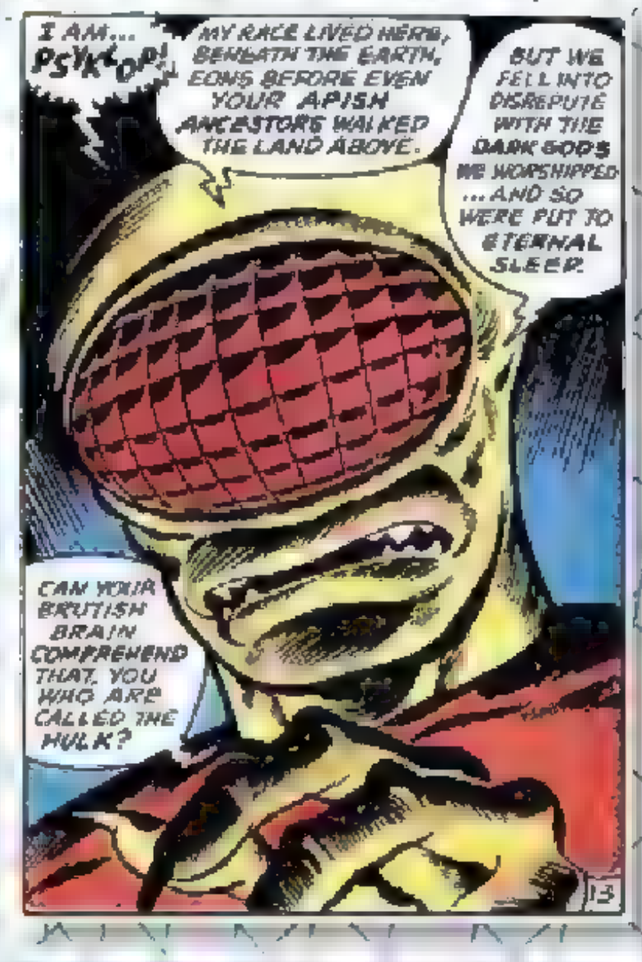
CH: You're old buddies with Paul Chadwick and Ken Steacy. What did they bring to the project?

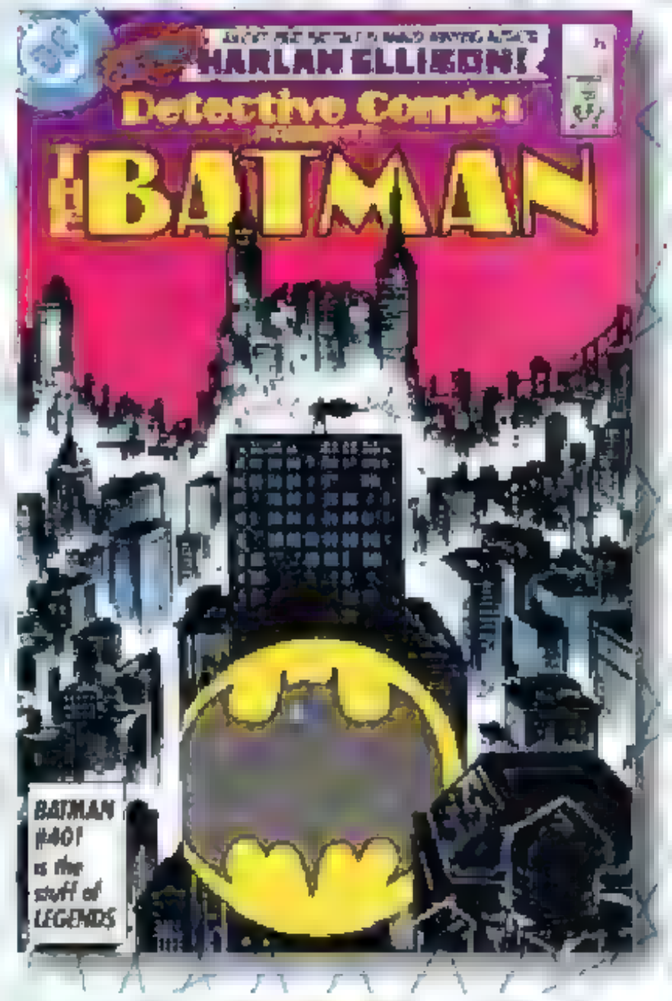
HE: Paul and Kenny have operated as two of the lobes of my brain, as we were like Athos, Porthos and Aramis on this book. I don't think it would have looked the way it is, or be what it is, had it not been for those two guys. I came up with the basic plot, the lines and the action but Paul is one of the premiere popular artists of our time. His *Concrete* is a benchmark for intelligence, so when you give him something as broad and as swashbuckling as *7 Against Chaos*, he brings a leavening that adds a human context – make that an alien/human context – to it that makes it work, as otherwise it's just another superhero foray.

CH: They're both accomplished writers, like yourself. Did that have a bearing on the storytelling process?

HE: Absolutely. Because I hadn't written the entire screenplay as such, or done it as a novel, there were places where there were jumps where Paul had to fill in the dialogue or some minute detail of the action, and he did it seamlessly and in my voice. It really was like we were three of the Seven




I AM... PSYK'OP!
MY RACE LIVED HERE, BENEATH THE EARTH, EONS BEFORE EVEN YOUR APISH ANCESTORS WALKED THE LAND ABOVE.
BUT WE FELL INTO DISREPUTE WITH THE DARK GODS WE WORSHIPPED ...AND SO WERE PUT TO ETERNAL SLEEP.
CAN YOUR BRUTISH BRAIN COMPREHEND THAT, YOU WHO ARE CALLED THE HULK?
13



Samurai, as there's a unity among Paul, Kenny and myself that goes back a long way. We've been friends for over 30 years, and I've worked with Ken before. When he came on board, Paul had already done the pencils so he ended up bringing his own special palette, so it's got a dimensionality to it that was not on the flat black-and-white. We each added to the other, and didn't diminish the other. I've had cases before where I've written a wonderful story and the artist has done some wonderful pencils, but then the colourist has just killed it. The colourist can add an entire world behind what you've already conceived, and that's what Ken did.

CH: Like *The Magnificent Seven* before it, *7 Against Chaos* pays homage to Akira Kurosawa's seminal *Seven Samurai*. But are there also parallels with archetypal superhero tropes?

HE: There's the Freudian concept of the gestalt, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, which is very appealing; Theodore Sturgeon wrote about it in *More Than Human*. You take individual talents, which in and of themselves are rare and impressive, and you meld them with their equals so that you wind up getting something much, much greater.

The big problem with Superman is where do you find a nemesis for him that is powerful as he is? You can't just have him fight the Nazis because that's just too overwhelming, since they can't defeat him.

When I conceived *7 Against Chaos*, I made sure that the threat was basic and dangerous enough that you would have to have someone go on a harrowing mission to find the proper elements of the gestalt.

CH: The story's fifth-generation computers are inspired by your reservations about digital technology, but many fans will download *7 Against Chaos* on their iPads and iPhones...

HE: That disarms me. I find all these appliances more alienating and isolating than I can put into words. A book is a shared experience between the author and the reader and a graphic novel is the same thing. You actually sit there and you hold the adventure in your hands. You can stop it and start it, turn it back and rewind it and go forward as you like. You have all the voices and you see all the sights.

I think a graphic novel is one of the most perfect forms for telling a story, and that's why I'm so proud and pleased with having had Paul and Kenny join me in this particular adventure. When I realise that somebody is going to see it reduced to the size of a pancake in their hand and click it with a finger, I'm not against it – I'm not anti-technology – but I just think that science should serve the common need of learning to read, since being active in reading is one of the things that took us out of the caves. **HE**

I think a graphic novel is one of the most perfect forms for telling a story

Above: Ellison has sprinkled his storytelling magic on comics' biggest guns, including Batman, the Avengers and the X-Men, but *7 Against Chaos* is his first original graphic novel

***7 Against Chaos* is available now, and reviewed on page 99.**

Dark wings

James O'Barr

The creator of *The Crow*, one of the most potent supernatural revenge thrillers in comics, returns to the character that's haunted him for nearly 25 years.

By Stephen Jewell

There aren't many comic book creators quite like James O'Barr. An orphan, he was raised by foster parents, joined the US Marines, hung out with heavy metal bands, and has only ever had the briefest of flirtations with mainstream comic publishers; his work comes from an anger and a frustration at the cruelties life can throw at you, and his most famous creation – *The Crow*, a huge international hit perhaps best described as a goth take on *Death Wish* – seems part of a coping mechanism.

Various comic books, numerous films and a TV series have spun out of this tale of a murdered young rocker resurrected by a magical crow and sent on a mission of revenge against the gang who killed him and raped his girlfriend, leaving her for dead. The most famous of these, of course, was Alex Proyas' bleakly alluring 1994 movie adaptation, a film that became infamous for the tragic on-set accident that claimed the life of its leading actor (and Bruce Lee's son), Brandon Lee.

And now – just as Hollywood prepares to bring the fateful tale of rock star-turned-supernatural spirit of vengeance Eric Draven back to the big screen in a new film directed by F Javier Gutiérrez and starring *Fast & Furious 6*'s Luke Evans – the Dallas-based writer/artist has returned to his seminal story in a big way.

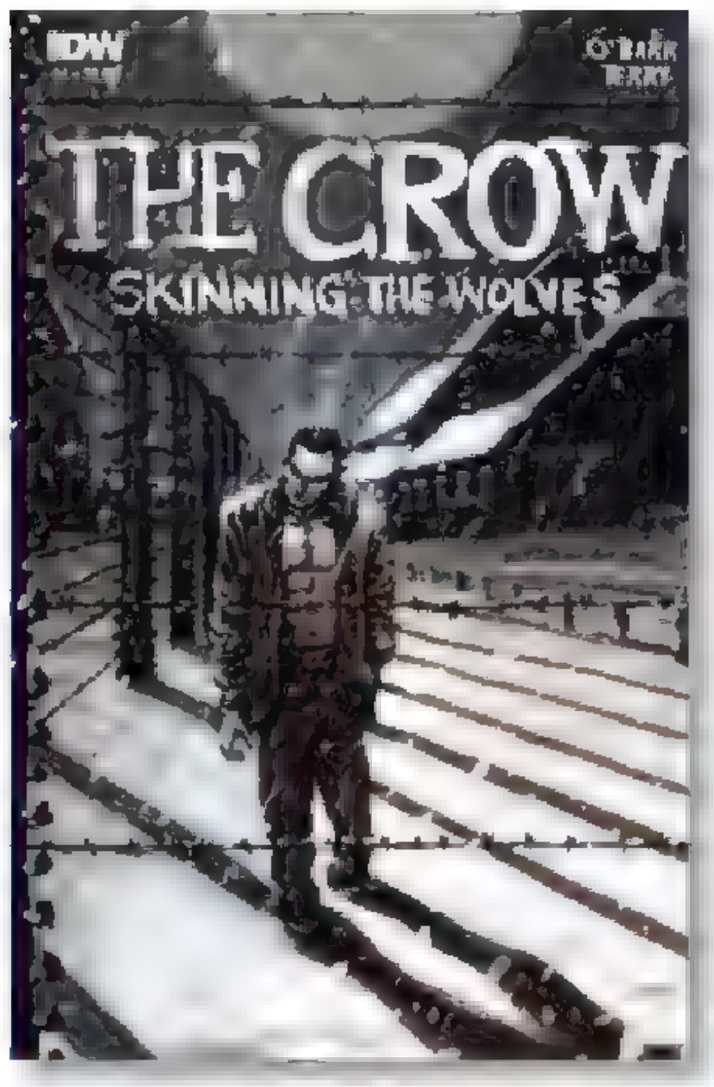
After updating the original text, first published from 1989 on, in 2011's *The Crow: Special Edition*, he has not only penned two brand new three-part miniseries – last year's *Skinning The Wolves* for artist Jim Terry and the current *Curare* with Antoine Dodé – but is also embarking on a third new miniseries that he'll illustrate himself. *The Crow*'s a simple tale at heart, but it has undeniable power – and a strong grip on the imaginations of creator and audience alike.

BORN DETROIT

HIGH THE CROW

NOW THE CROW

MORE www.idwpublishing.com



Comic Heroes: *The Crow* was initially inspired by the death of your girlfriend in a hit-and-run accident in the late '70s; a horrific incident, so we'd imagine assembling the *Special Edition* brought back some painful memories?

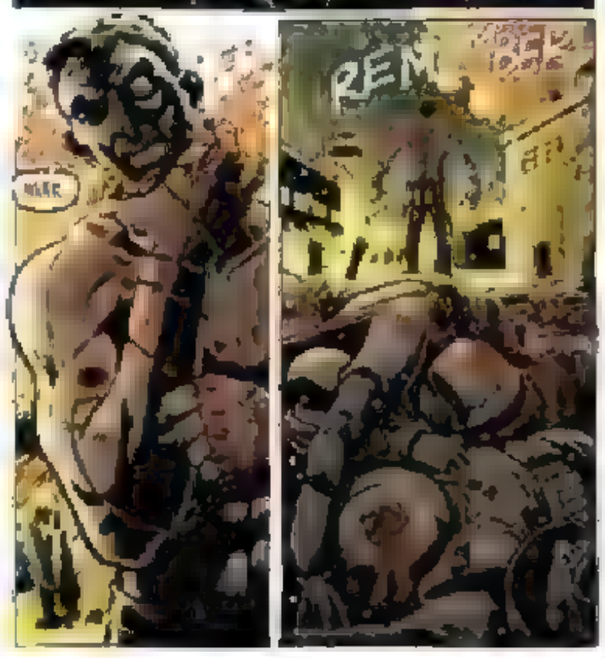
James O'Barr: It did at some points. But my views on what exactly the book is have changed over the years. Essentially, when I first started working on it, it was just one long scream of rage. But now, in retrospect, I understand that it's a love story. It was a little difficult revisiting some of those old pages, as it was working on the new segments that were added as well. But I'm now at peace – maybe not with the world, but at least with this project and what spawned it.

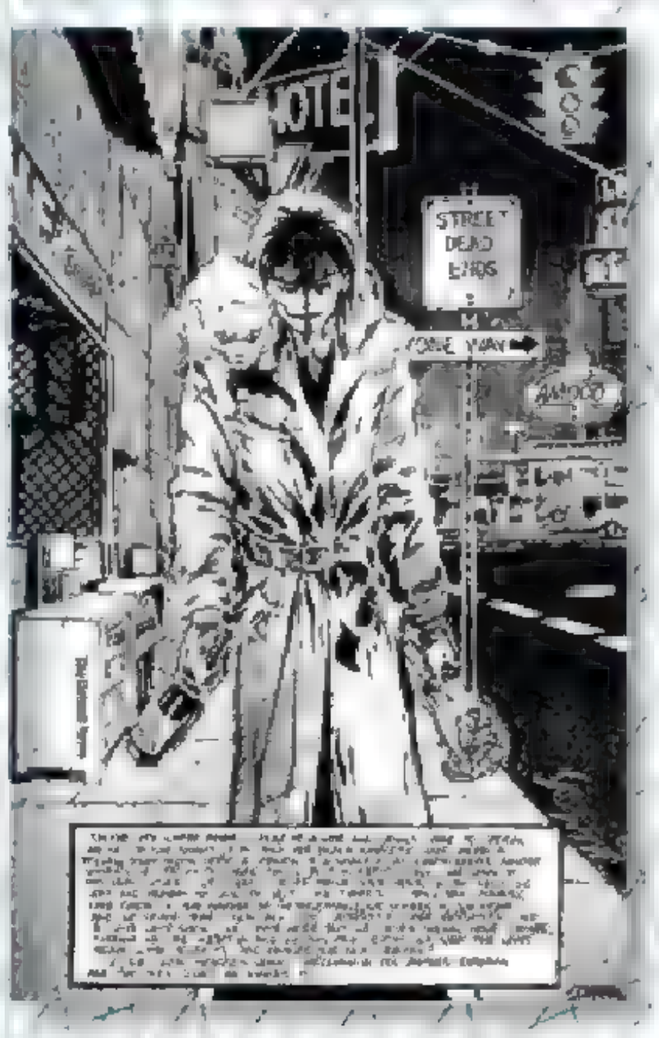
> **Now, in retrospect, I understand that it's a love story**

CH: Was it important to maintain the existing spirit of the book, and how hard was it to resist the temptation to tinker endlessly with it?

JOB: I definitely had to restrain myself from doing that kind of George Lucas thing, where you just go back and shine everything up. There are definitely pages that I wanted to completely redraw, just because I've become a much better artist in the intervening years. But I resisted that urge because, well, it is what it is.

The *Special Edition* is essentially the way I originally wanted it to be without any kind of editorial input; it's exactly the book that I've always wanted to make. So the idea was to reinstate all of the missing





segments that were dropped back then, and to add a few more layers to how Eric and Shelly were when they were happy before the tragedy.

CH: *The Crow* first appeared through the long defunct Caliber Press in 1990, and has since been published by the likes of Tundra, Kitchen Sink and Image, before IDW picked it up in 2012. Does anywhere feel like home?

JOB: IDW is the first company where I've felt like I was working with them rather than for or against them. They've been exceptional. Everything I've asked for, they've acquiesced – although not always without argument. Initially I had to earn their trust, as they questioned some of my early judgments at times. But I think the fact that the books I've been involved with have sold really well means that we're all really excited about the whole franchise, and willing to give me room.

CH: Rather than continuing with Eric and Shelly, *Skinning The Wolves* featured a completely different Crow and was set in 1945, at the end of World War 2...

JOB: Initially it wasn't even a Crow story. It was just another typical rage story, and – at first – it was intended to be a really short 20-something page story too. But I've known the artist, Jim Terry, for years – and I thought the story would be perfect for him because we both have such a fascination with World War 2.

CH: It takes place against the backdrop of a Nazi concentration camp, so there's a degree of extra darkness...

JOB: It's something that I still have trouble understanding now, as I just don't know how things like that can occur in the real world. But the reality is that America did something similar with the American Indians to what the Germans did with the Jews. Only we did it in slow motion – and were more successful. So there's definitely an American touchstone in that as well.

CH: *Curare*, meanwhile, alludes to a real-life murder...

JOB: It's based on a true story of an eight-year-old girl who was murdered, and the cop who was trying to solve her case for almost 20 years. In reality, the case was never solved – but in our story the little girl comes back to life to help the cop solve the case.

Again, it's a chance for me to explore the concept of justice on paper in a situation where it didn't actually exist in the real world.

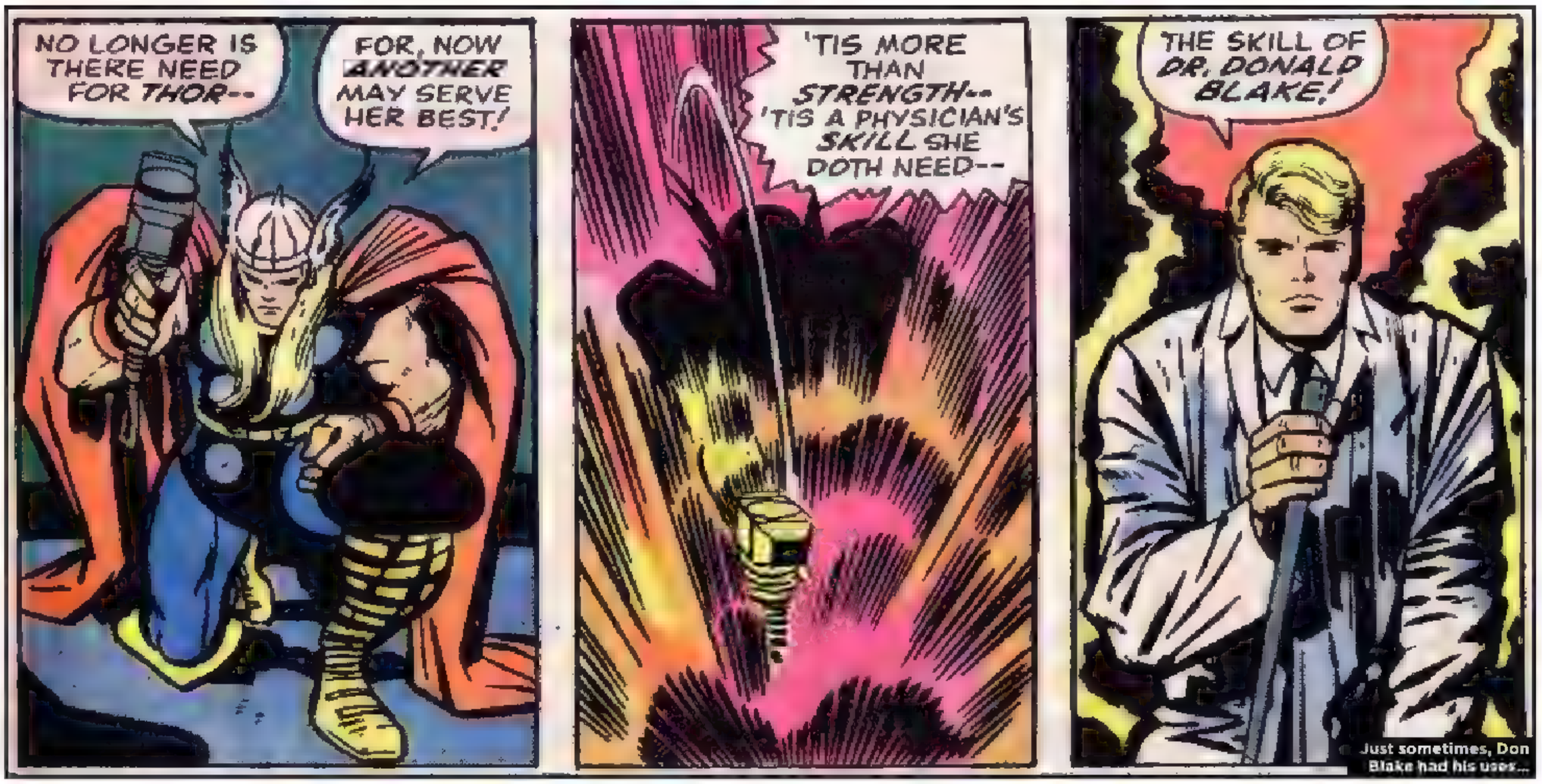
CH: You've returned to the drawing board on the next *Crow* series. Have you altered your techniques at all?

JOB: I'm a bit of a Luddite when it comes to technology, as I don't use computers for anything. All my artwork is ink on paper, and I don't use Photoshop. I even do my own lettering on the original artwork. I understand that they're just tools, but I have no use for them – the idea of dragging a brush across the paper is where the joy lies for me. That's what elevates it above a job, as I'm fundamentally creating this for myself. It's a blank sheet of paper and that's the challenge. That's what I love about art and storytelling. CH

Above: *The Crow* different scenarios, all fuelled by rage and heavy on themes of revenge and bloody retribution

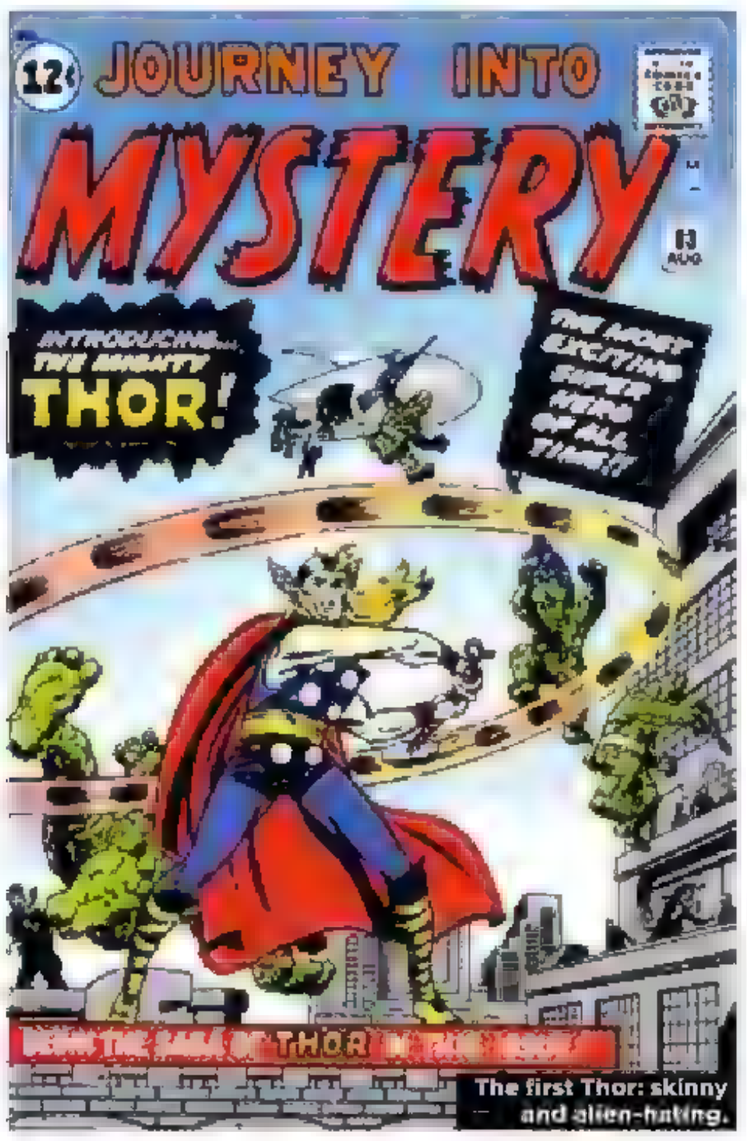
***The Crow: Curare* is currently on sale, and is reviewed on page 102.**

I SAY THEE NAY!


NO LONGER IS THERE NEED FOR THOR--
FOR, NOW ANOTHER MAY SERVE HER BEST!
'TIS MORE THAN STRENGTH-- 'TIS A PHYSICIAN'S SKILL SHE DOTH NEED--
THE SKILL OF DR. DONALD BLAKE!
Just sometimes, Don Blake had his uses...

A...Images © Marvel Comics

Whether it's alien invasions or monsters from myth, the mighty Thor – Norse God of Thunder and Marvel's biggest ass-kicker – stands firm against them. But the Odinson isn't just a blonde hunk with a hammer, and twice now his comics have shown the entire industry how it's done... **By Matt Bielby**


12¢
JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY
INTRODUCING... THE MIGHTY THOR!
THE MOST EXCITING SUPER HERO OF ALL TIME!!
The first Thor: skinny and alien-hating.

There's no other superhero quite like Thor. Some are more powerful, of course – Superman, most writers would agree, and a smattering of others, few of whom matter much – but for sheer grandeur and majestic splendour no one quite matches up to the Thunderer. At their best, Thor stories are both utterly unlike other superhero comics, and at the same time show them the way – for, at least a couple of times now, *Thor* has been the most innovative book on the shelves.

Great Thor stories make the mythic real and relatable; show us unknown worlds filtered through the unique lens of superpowered science fiction Viking barbarians; feature the most momentous, Earth-shattering fight scenes in comics; and wow with forceful, monolithic, wide-ranging art like no other book. They have a Pop Art punch coupled with a sense of real cosmic importance too: no Peter Parker-style everymen these, the cast of *Thor* have big emotions, struggle through mighty betrayals, and tackle the most gigantic threats. There's an outlandish gravity to the stuff that happens here few strips can match.

But *Thor* isn't just big, it also innovates. Over the years there's been many a seen-it-all-before quest, it's true – it's the rare major Marvel or DC property that hasn't seen whole years, or even decades, of dull somewhere along the line – but when *Thor* pulls its finger out, Asgard and Midgard quiver in unison.

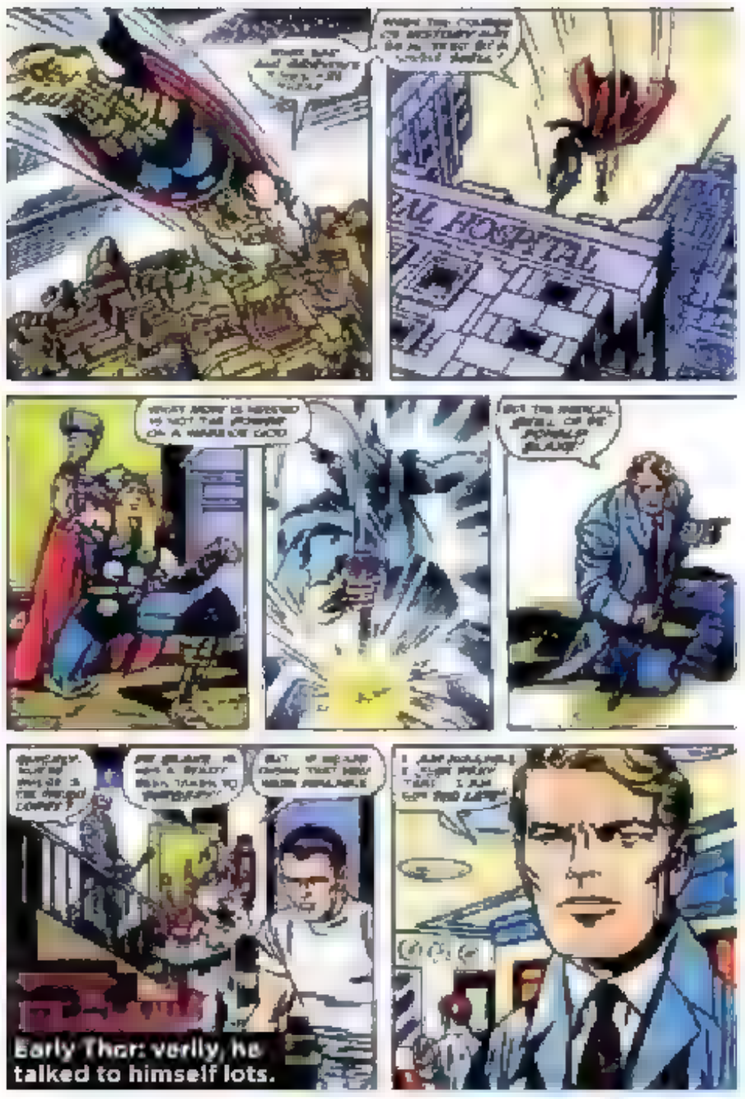
To get a feel for *Thor*'s importance, just look at the things the strip invented in the '60s. How about the heavy use of action sprawling across entire single panel pages, or even whole spreads? Or what about the use of photo-collage to add pizazz to regular comic art? Or the refinement of the classic superheroic figure to the point where every hero looked the absolute stuff of legend when resting, and a force of nature in action?

Most of all, though, what about the invention, in large part, of what we now understand to be the classic Marvel style – one built of fast-paced, interlocking stories, each epic and bombastic, full of melodrama, and rammed with new characters, places and inventions?

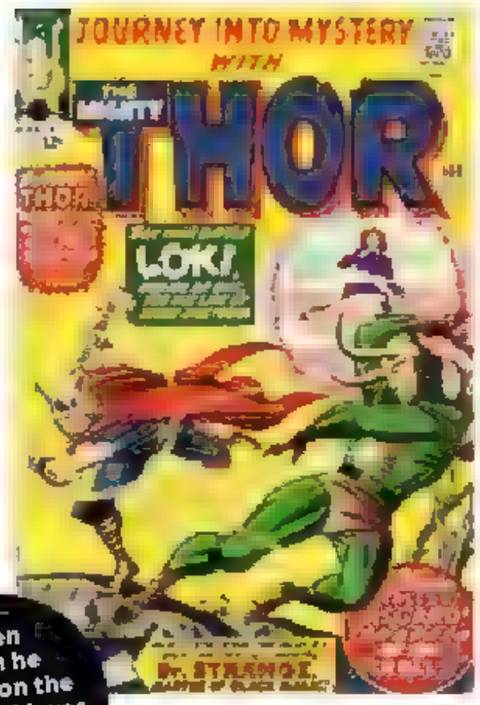
This was first fully expressed on *Thor*, and the strip's innovative, free-flowing narrative embraced the breakneck pace of movie serial continuity like no other before it. What had been the basic unit of comic book storytelling – the single issue story – has been an endangered species ever since.

Packed with iconic figures – each one more than human, and many the living personifications of human traits and fears – *Thor* explores endless vistas beyond realism (certainly beyond time and space as we know them), and forever threatens to make even the most inventive regular superhero narrative look prosaic and dull. *Journey Into Mystery* changed its title to *Thor* with #126, but »

BEYOND OUR SEGMENT OF TIME AND SPACE, THERE EXISTS ASGARD, THE CITADEL OF THE NORSE GODS, WHICH IS CONNECTED TO EARTH BY A RAINBOW BRIDGE CALLED BIFROST!
Asgard, home of the mighty Norse gods.



STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE MIGHTY THOR!
WHERE DWELL THE DEMONS!
I MUST FIND THE STUNNING SIF!
THERE BE STRANGE DANGER HERE ON EARTH...
IT MUST NOT STRIKE HER WHOM I LOVE!
PRODUCED BY: STAN (MAN) LEE and JACK (KING) KIRBY
INKING: VINCE COLLETTA · LETTERING: SAM ROSEN



Even when he wasn't on the cover, Loki was behind most early plots...

kept the numbering – making it the longest running Marvel comic, if we count it all as the same beast. (Yes, the current title has started from #1 again, but it's bound to see the error of its ways soon.) Now, *that's* awesome. But then, so is everything about Thor.

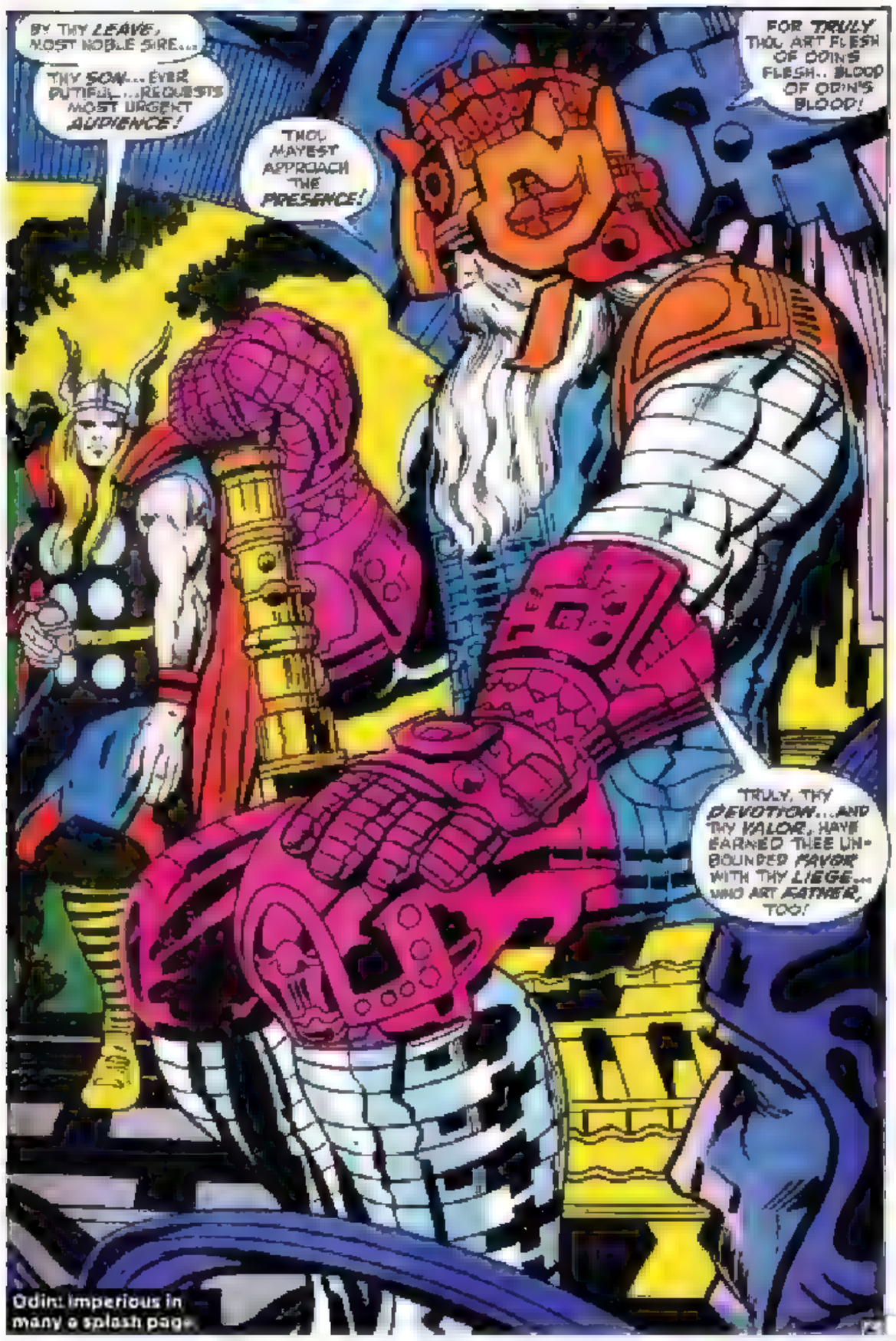
'SO BE IT!'

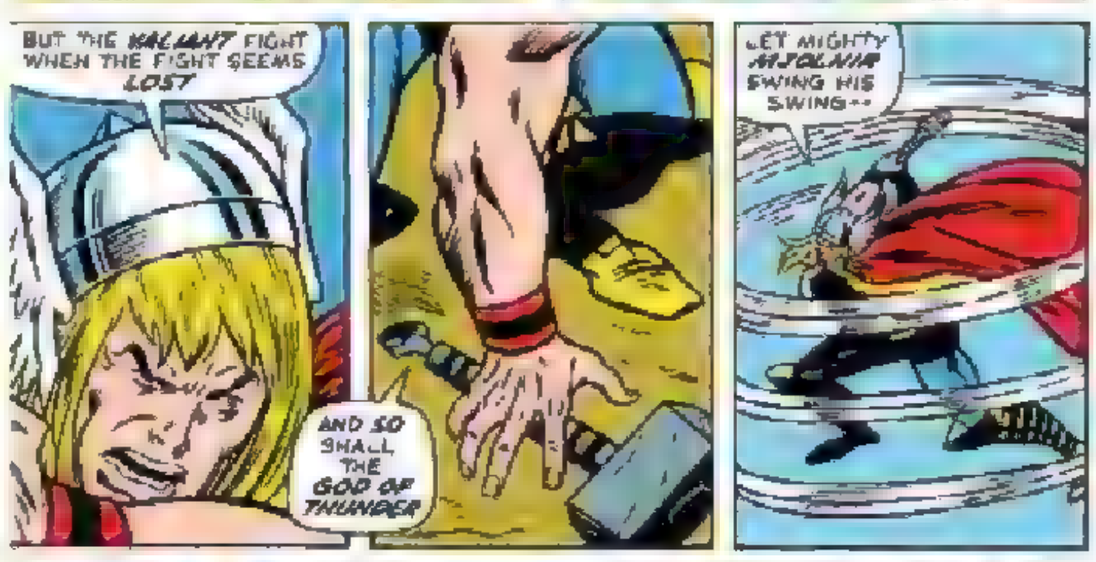
Jack Kirby's talent was a mountain range, and it had many peaks, but the biggest – his Everest – showed its face at the start of the '60s and remained towering and monolithic for the next 10 years or so, an ever-changing landscape heaving with surprise plateaus and shock precipices around any one of which might lurk some strange being or lost civilisation. At the point where he – with Stan Lee running to keep up – effectively invented the Marvel Universe, his imagination was a volcano, puking out thrilling, two-fisted, bizarre-yet-believable concepts one after another after another. And amongst the punchiest was Thor – Kirby's take on a Norse warrior-god, a Viking Superman in a helmet and cape, speaking a cod-Shakespearian language full of thees and thous as he kept Earth safe from interstellar invasion and fairytale monstrosity both.

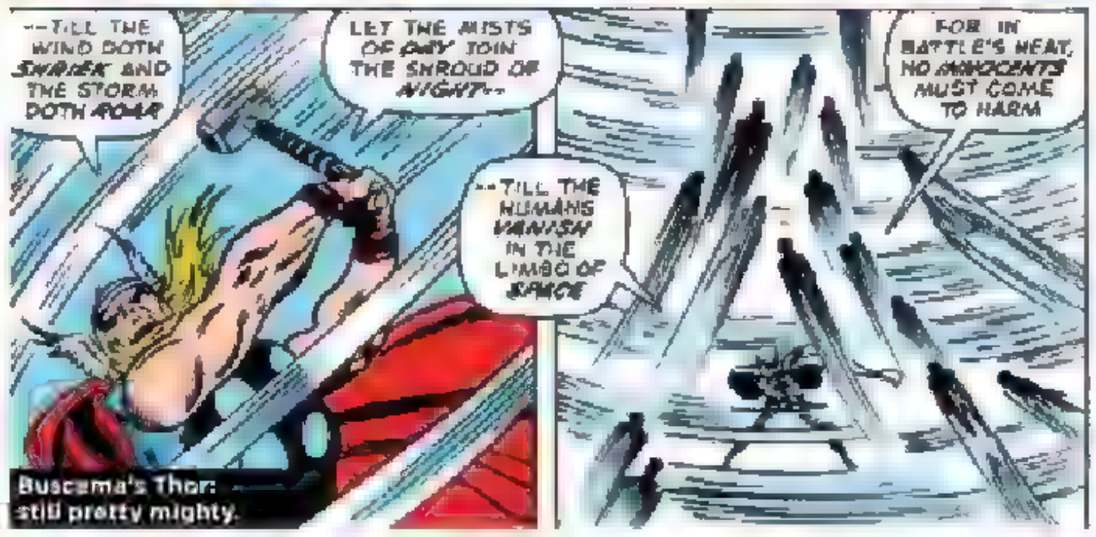
But more than that – and taking far less time to show itself than had been the case with the Last Son of Krypton – Thor enjoyed an incredible mythic background too; behind him stretched a fantasy land of shining cities and surly trolls, of noble godlings and evil witches, every trope of European folk-tale written big and superheroic by Kirby's skill. Better – and so unlike Kal-Els' homeworld, over which Superman could only mope – it wasn't lost to him forever, but existed somewhere over the horizon, to be visited by magic hammer or Rainbow Bridge any time he wanted. And, increasingly, the path between worlds became a two-way street…

Thor's early adventures were mostly Earthbound – mildly disappointing to eager Marvel readers keen to see what Stan and Jack could do with a superhero who was also a god – but as more Asgardians and other supernatural beings were introduced, this ceased to be a problem. Sheer fantasy started to feature louder and louder in the mix, and the *Thor* strip became stronger for it.

Kirby's art and imagination were both growing in unison, becoming bolder, louder, more wild. Thor was as handsome and noble as any hero, but his background was stranger and more incredible – and even before the *Fantastic Four* began its epic mid-'60s run that defined modern Marvel, *Thor* was


BY THY LEAVE, MOST NOBLE SIRE...
THY SON... EVER DUTIFUL... REQUESTS MOST URGENT AUDIENCE!
THOU MAYEST APPROACH THE PRESENCE!
FOR TRULY THOU ART FLESH OF ODIN'S FLESH.. BLOOD OF ODIN'S BLOOD!
TRULY, THY DEVOTION... AND THY VALOR, HAVE EARNED THEE UNBOUNDED FAVOR WITH THY LIEGE... WHO ART FATHER, TOO!
Odin: imperious in many a splash page.




--TILL THE WIND DOTH SHRIEK AND THE STORM DOTH ROAR
LET THE MISTS OF DAY JOIN THE SHROUD OF NIGHT--
--TILL THE HUMANS VANISH IN THE LIMBO OF SPACE
FOR IN BATTLE'S HEAT, NO INNOCENTS MUST COME TO HARM
Buscema's Thor: still pretty mighty.

showing the way, a one-man Pathfinder Squadron. These were comics to drop jaws.

'BY ASGARD'S GOLDEN GATES!'

The very same month that Spider-Man had first been tried out as a lead character (August, 1962), Lee and Kirby had come up with another hero, one that was to have almost as much impact on comics as Peter Parker's bad-luck alter-ego. This guy was to be a dynamic new take on the ancient Viking god, Thor, and he became the regular lead hero in their *Journey Into Mystery* title, one of Marvel's numerous failing monster books now being retro-fitted as homes for superheroes. (That title's previous most celebrated star: the hairy Hulk – no relation – later to be known as Xemnu the Titan.)

In this new Marvel version we first meet our hero in human form, magically transformed by his father Odin – the leader of the Norse Gods, with a blustering nobility and temper to match – into a blonde, lame, rather weedy American surgeon, all part of the Allfather's ongoing, rather cack-handed attempts to teach Thor humility. (This rather colourless Clark Kent to Thor's Superman would eventually prove morally and logically problematic to both Odin and the strip itself, not to mention relentlessly dull…)

Shortly, in one of those classic Marvel twists of fate, Blake – who has no idea he is really Thor – witnesses a scouting party for an alien invasion while holidaying in a remote part of Norway; soon he's fleeing into a cave and finding an old walking stick, which, seemingly in anger, he feels compelled to strike against the rocks. In a flash – Stan missed a trick here, by not coming up with a cool signature 'transformation' noise like 'Shazam!' – lightning strikes, and Blake is transformed into a handsome blonde giant, the stick now mighty Mjolnir, the Thunder God's war hammer. The aliens, of course, don't stand a chance.

The first surprise here: what Marvel's Thor looks like. Yes, he's clearly a Viking, with his mighty winged helmet, but he's no gruff, red-bearded berserker like traditional depictions of Thor. This guy, instead, is prettier, more courtly – Prince Valiant in a superhero outfit, complete with massive cape, fancy boots and bizarre armour-like chest plates. And he can do stuff the legends never told of too – like effectively 'fly' by the simple mechanism of throwing his hammer with super-strength then just not letting go. It defied the laws of physics, sure, but it was compelling and intriguing – and just the sort of thing kids could try in the playground.

Soon Thor and Don Blake are sharing a life, like Captain Marvel and Billy Batson: Blake treats New York's sick and then, when danger threatens, Thor crops up to take it outside. But things soon get complicated. Both fall »

“*Thor* was showing the way, a one-man Pathfinder Squadron. These were comics to drop jaws”

Mid-period Odin plays with folks' lives.

for Jane Foster, Blake's hot nurse assistant, and Thor's presence on Earth attracts the manipulative attentions of his rotten half-brother Loki, a magic-using trickster god who is forever dragging mythical foes to Manhattan, or creating new ones here, to cause gleeful trouble.

Though the early issues are nothing amazing – too often, a cursing or giggling Loki is revealed to be behind every woe – the vital nature of the world Kirby, especially, was tapping into here was coming into focus. As, slowly, we learned more about Thor's background, the strip became increasingly irresistible – but there were problems. Chief amongst them was the old Superman conundrum: what sort of stories could you tell about a hero as powerful as Thor?

Could you have him fight monsters? They tried it; but the pure variety lacked character. Commies? Tried it too; didn't quite fit. Science fiction villains – like Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man – had more legs, however, and they'd certainly hit paydirt with Loki, who'd starred in the first properly good Thor story, in *JIM* #85. But it was patchy stuff in the early years – not least because Lee'd handed over most of the writing to this brother, Larry Lieber, at this point, and Kirby, too, dropped the ball a number of times. Totally over-stretched, he kept disappearing, to be replaced by lesser hands for an issue or two.

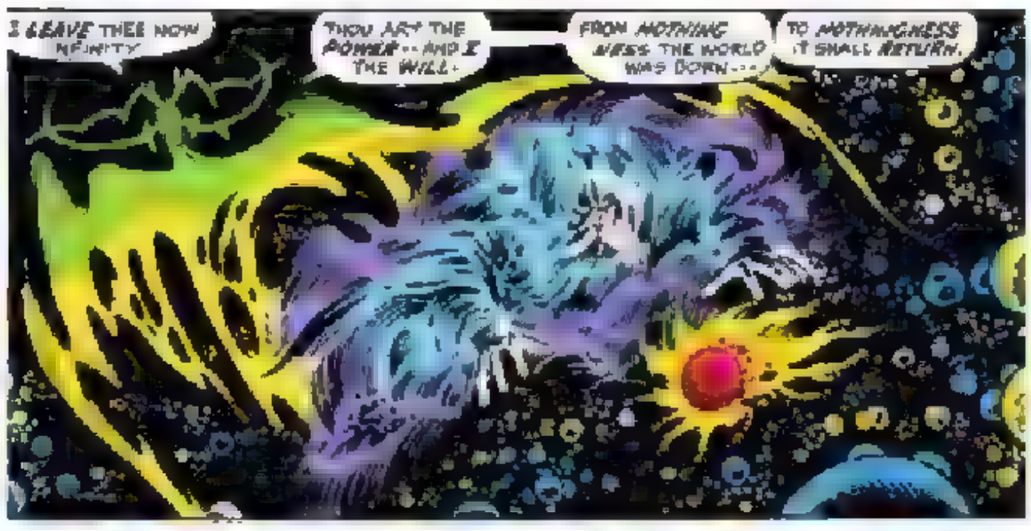
Because of all this divided attention, some early *Thors* can seem clunky and formulaic indeed, revolving too often around a petulant, childlike Thor's love for the mortal Jane – in a Superman/Lois rip-off, she doesn't rate his human variant – and how angry this makes Odin, thus giving an in for all Loki's niggling. Issue after issue, a vengeful Odin would punish his son for spending so much time dilly-dallying with humans, and though Loki's ongoing scheming remain the liveliest part of the mix, even he starts to outstay his welcome, appearing in over half the early issues. Odin's uselessness as chief god becomes painfully obvious early on too; he's forever looking the other way each time Loki incriminates himself, making this pompous Allfather an increasingly laughable figure.

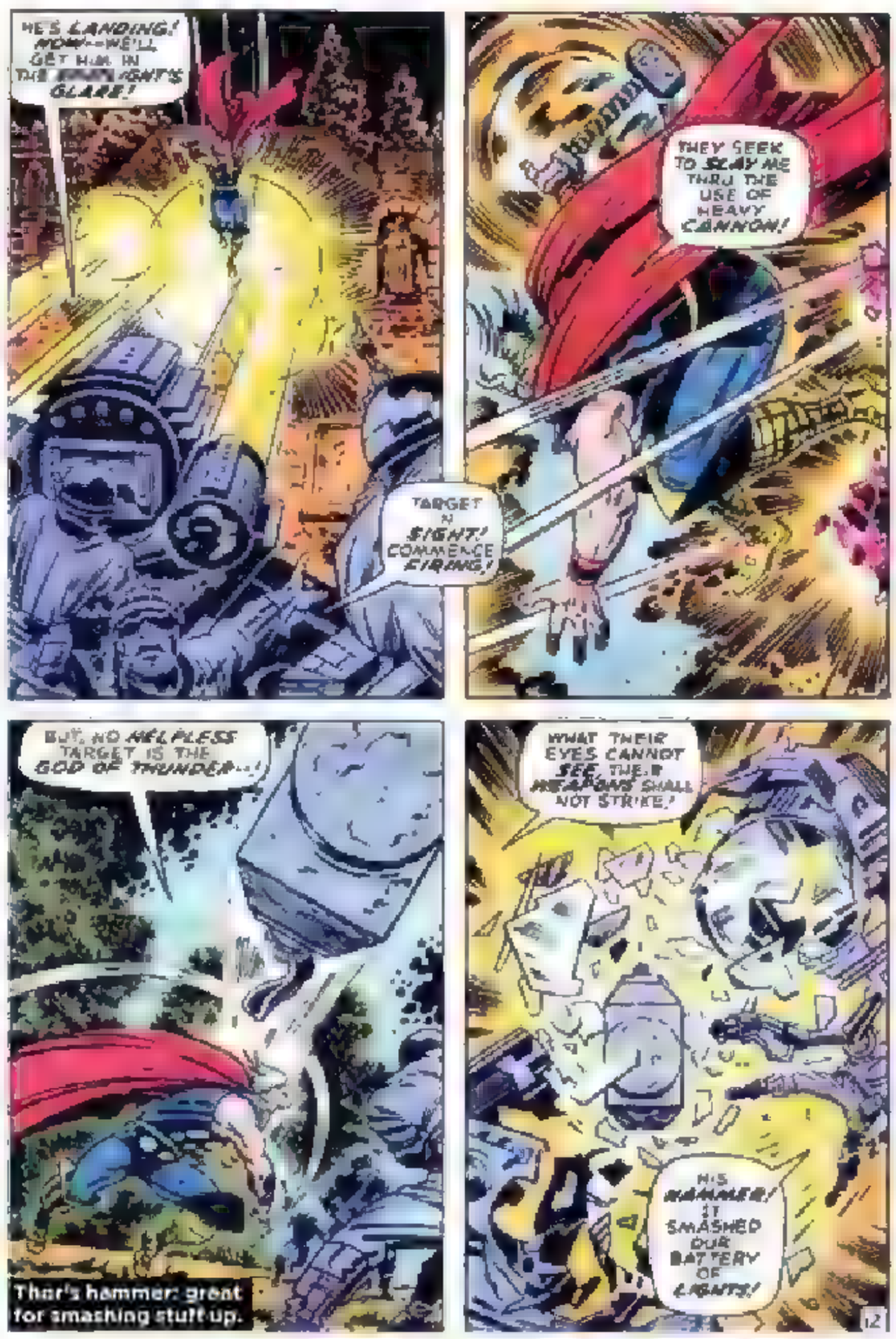
But slowly it gets better. Realising the potential, perhaps, Lee and Kirby both start to devote more time to the strip, and it shows. Kirby's pencils add power by the issue, and Lee quickly learns how to have fun with all the pomp and ceremony of the dialogue, peppering the speech balloons with playfully archaic words and sentence construction. By the start of 1964, the pair are on a roll...

'THE GOD OF THUNDER DARES!'

Thor had begun in 1962 as a strange pop culture take on obscure Norse myth, super-Vikings in space. But the early stories, while wide-ranging, had mostly treated him as a conventional – if exceptionally powerful – superhero with a bizarre background. 1964 was the year it became properly good, but the one before had shown what promise *Thor* really contained, and it had begun with the addition of a regular back-up series in the pages of *Journey Into Mystery* called *Tales Of Asgard*.

Starting in the *JIM* #97 of October 1963, Kirby and Lee started to explore in these stories the fantastical otherworld that had shaped their strange super-god. Each of these five-page tales told something of the early days


I LEAVE THEE NOW INFINITY
THOU ART THE POWER... AND I THE WILL.
FROM NOTHING WERE THE WORLD WAS BORN...
TO NOTHINGNESS IT SHALL RETURN.


HE'S LANDING! NOW--WE'LL GET HIM IN THE SUN'S GLARE!
THEY SEEK TO SLAY ME THRU THE USE OF HEAVY CANNON!
TARGET IN SIGHT! COMMENCE FIRING!
BUT, NO HELPLESS TARGET IS THE GOD OF THUNDER...!
WHAT THEIR EYES CANNOT SEE, THEIR WEAPONS SHALL NOT STRIKE!
HIS HAMMER! IT SMASHED OUR BATTERY OF LIGHTS!
Thor's hammer: great for smashing stuff up.

of our Asgardian heroes, often twisting an existing myth to new ends. These tiny treats, heaving with giants and dwarves and all the dark creatures of European fairytale, were amongst the crowning achievements of early Marvel and ran right through to *Thor* #145.

At first, Lee – and Kirby too – had balked at making Thor *too* strange. Tradition said that you had to set your tales on a recognisable version of Earth to keep readers with you, but that didn't seem to be a problem here. Indeed, the letter-writing keener fans were soon talking about *TOA* as much as they were the main strip – this, it seemed, was where the secrets were hidden, the bodies buried.

Now, seeing this success, Kirby started to take the main storylines in more fantastic, mythological directions too, beginning with the introduction of a pair of new Asgardian villains to match the ever-present Loki in *JIM* #103 – the beguiling Enchantress and her muscle-bound stooge (and wannabe-lover), initially introduced as simply 'the Executioner'.

These two first turned up in early 1964, and now Loki would follow up by transforming a bruiser called Crusher Creel into the mighty Absorbing Man. Almost immediately, the threat levels Thor faced seemed ramped up, and the business of Earth and Asgard more closely intertwined than ever.

It was here that storylines began leaping from issue to issue, with too much going on for any one month's adventure to contain it all. Now a contest between Thor and Loki to grab some magical McGuffin could stretch through five issues, overlapping with both an extended Absorbing Man story and the beginnings of an ongoing rivalry with that champion of another ancient pantheon, the Greek demi-god Hercules. And then, fast on his sandalled heels, would come an unexpected threat from yet another quarter: a crazed Darwinian experimenter in forced evolution called The High Evolutionary. It was sprawling, confused, but thrilling too – and it took two years for most of these plotlines to be tied up in *Thor* #135, at the end of 1966, by which point a whole longship of replacements were queuing, ready to take their place.

> **“Kirby started to take the main storylines in more fantastic, mythological directions”**

'AND NOW, TO THE DEATH!'

So what had happened? How had *Thor* suddenly got so good?

The thing was, in Marvel's formative years Stan had Kirby stretched so thin, his workload so overwhelming, that there was no way »

NOW BEHOLD A SCENE EYE CAN SCARCE SEEM ALIEN TO YOU NOW THESE DAYS WHEN YOU HOLSEY PRIMARILY ON EARTH AND THOUGHT OF YOURSELF AS ONE OF THOSE CALLED "A SUPERHERO."
YOU FOUGHT BOTH ALONE AND WITH THOSE WHO CALLED THEM-SELVES AVENGERS...
...THOUGH EVEN THEN, THERE WERE GOOD SHOWS BOTH FOR WHOS AND FOES
We can't remember who the eye is either!

for him to always be at his peak. Who could be, when asked to turn out over 1,000 pages a year? (That's almost three a day, after all, without even taking Sundays off.) It was no wonder some of it was scrappy around the edges, Kirby's imagination never quite given the space to do all it could.

The hardcore fans of the time, however, knew he could do better – Jack's earlier work on, say, *Challengers Of The Unknown* at DC had proved it – and by 1966 things were easing off a tad. Now Kirby was able to drop his workload down to just three books – three a month! Incredible to think of that as easy! – and he kept the ones that mattered to him. *The Fantastic Four*, where he'd invented the modern Marvel Universe, and was still throwing out concepts as strong as the Silver Surfer and Galactus every month. *Captain America*, the hero he'd created with Joe Simon in 1941. And his other favourite creation, *Thor*.

Mangog: same trunks as Fin Fang Foom!

'I SAY THEE NAY!'

For these three books, it seems Kirby effectively took on a huge percentage of the work by the mid-'60s. He would come up with the ideas, he would plot them and he would draw them. Yes, Stan Lee would still script these tales, adding a considerable amount of humour, logic and vim, and still contribute to the plotting too. But at heart these were Kirby's stories. (Often, we're told, plot conferences would take place in Lee's huge convertible as he drove Kirby and Marvel's art director, John Romita, home from work. But it seems Kirby would only take the stuff from these he liked, ignoring – or just conveniently forgetting – the rest.)

Now, given space to breathe and grow, issue after issue had started flowing straight from Kirby's imagination, and Lee was smart enough to allow him room. Given his head, each story was becoming bigger, stranger, more exciting, more complicated than before. Huge mythological concepts were sprouting in the *FF* too, and even *Cap* – but in *Thor*, especially, they found rich soil to take root in. These were stories rippling with ideas and visuals ripped out of history and religion both, and the strip thrived on them.

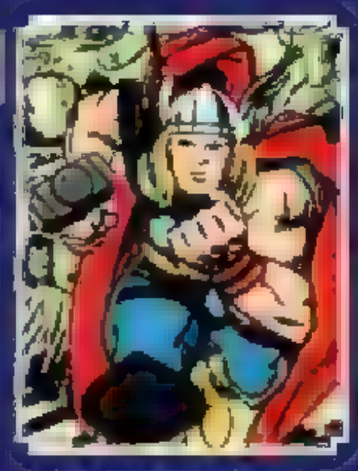
Earlier Marvel comics had been heavy on the ongoing soap opera too, it's true, but it »

Heroes & Villains

It's hard to think of a regular supporting cast with the heroic potential to match that of Thor: Hercules, Loki, Beta Ray Bill, Valkyrie and Balder have all headlined their own comics before, Sif too, and there are perhaps two dozen others here who'd make potentially excellent leads in further new incarnations of *Journey Into Mystery*. (Who'd argue with a Heimdall book? Or Young Odin? Or The Enchantress? Or Hela: Queen of Death? Or Ulik: Troll King? Or Warriors Three?)

For those keeping score, here are the leading lights of our tale – but across the Nine Worlds there are many more, from Ymir and Surtur to the Midgard Serpent, all worthy of our attentions too...

Thor



First appearance: Journey Into Mystery #83, August 1962

A sort of magical Superman, lame Doctor Don Blake taps his old walking stick and – blam! – is struck by a blinding flash of lightning, transformed into the ancient Norse God of Thunder, Thor. From the start Thor was a strip Jack Kirby loved and was intrigued by – you can see that from the mixing of man and gods that dominates much of his later work, from *The Fourth World* to *The Eternals* – but though something of an expert on the ancient religions of the world, he never felt the need to slavishly follow them. Power and majesty are two of the things fans comment on most when talking of Jack's heroes, and they don't come much more powerful or majestic than Thor.

Odin

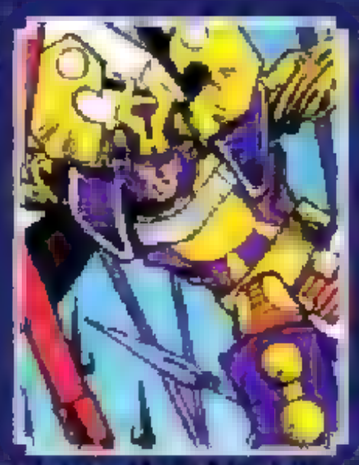
First appearance: Journey Into Mystery #85, October 1962

Asgard's overlord, chieftain of the Norse gods, and father to Thor and Loki. Many of the most memorable pages in *Thor* show Odin looking regal, stern or angry – sometimes all at once – in huge splash pages dominated by his white beard, single eye (sometimes!) and Viking war armour.

Loki

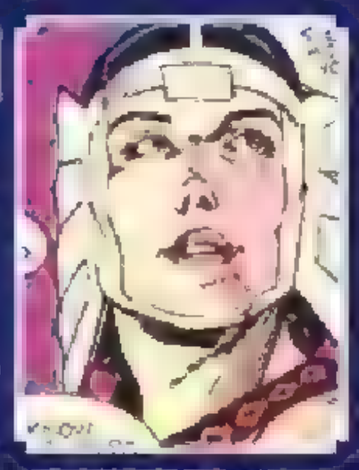
First appearance: Journey Into Mystery #85, October 1962
He's Thor's half-brother and Odin's son, but his chief hobby is plotting against them. Not physically in Thor's league, he's a trickster, a schemer – and responsible, it sometimes seems, for kicking off most of the mighty battles between his half-brother and assorted superpowered agents of destruction.

Balder the Brave



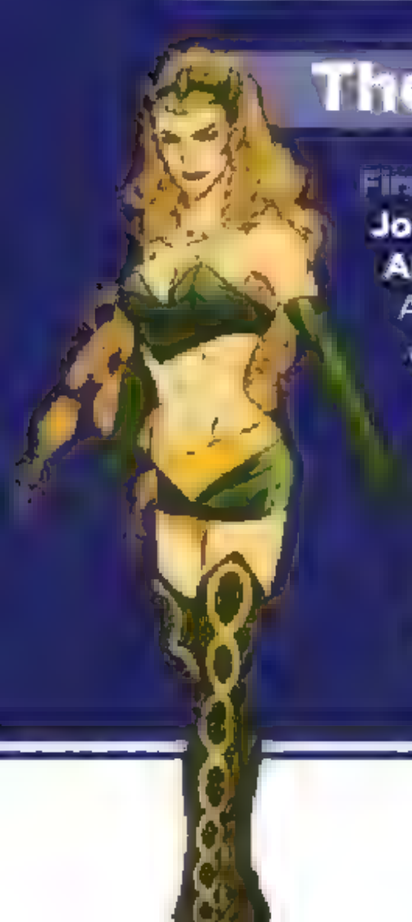
First appearance: Journey Into Mystery #85, October 1962
Courageous and fearless, he was Odin's 'perfect knight' and one of Thor's closest friends; his reinvention as a gone-to-seed pacifist, sick of killing but forced into it by circumstance (and Loki's scheming) was one of Walt Simonson's master-strokes.

Sif



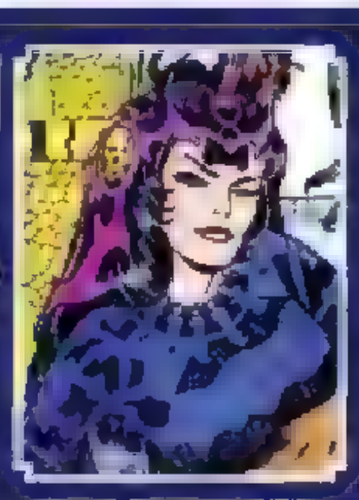
First appearance: Journey into Mystery #102, March 1964
Thor's main love interest, and a dynamic alternative to Jane Foster: raven-haired, a born warrior, and sister to Heimdall, she on-and-off competes with the likes of Valkyrie as Marvel's answer to Wonder Woman.

The Enchantress



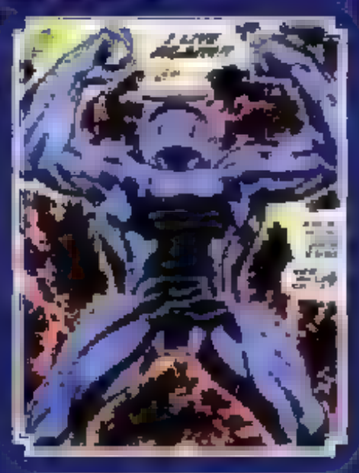
First appearance: Journey into Mystery #103, April 1964
Amora the Enchantress was an original creation, not directly based on myth; she trained with Karnilla, used her beauty and sorcery to manipulate men and gods both, and lusts after Thor even as she schemes to destroy him.

Karnilla



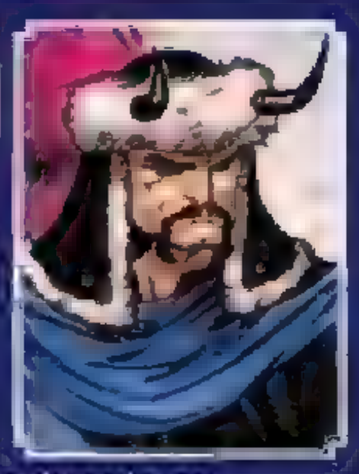
First appearance: Journey into Mystery #108, September 1964
This super-witch was Queen of the Norns, beautiful sorceress ruler from a mystical realm abutting Asgard, where her old school beauty hid the darkness in her soul.

The Destroyer



First appearance: Journey into Mystery #118, July 1965
This indestructible, soulless superwarrior, created by Odin for initially totally obscure reasons, is one of the deadliest bad guys Jack Kirby ever created. Bolts fired from his fingertips sliced Thor's hammer to pieces; the weakness is that he needed another mind to reanimate his empty metal form.

Hogun



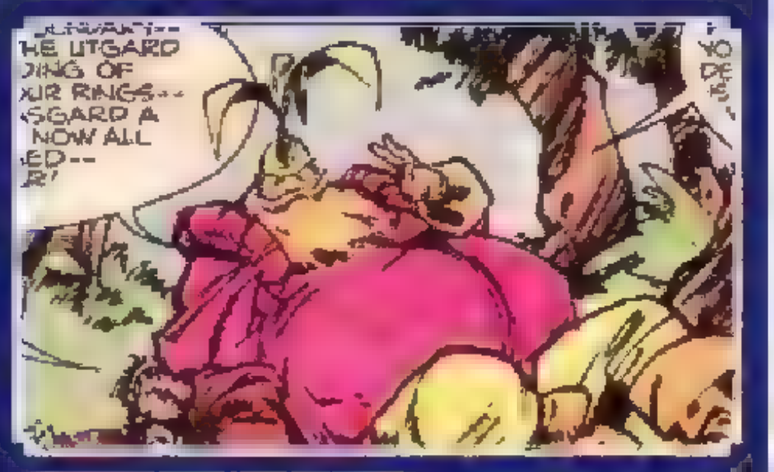
First appearance: Journey into Mystery #119, August 1965
When *Tales Of Asgard* changed from short stories into serialised epics in the back of *Thor*, Jack Kirby introduced new Asgardian warriors to fill out the cast, notably the Warriors Three. Silent, and armed with a brutal mace, Hogun the Grim was an ancient Hun or similar made godlike: a classic, determined archetype who, with the aid of his two buddies, threatened to steal every scene he was in.

Fandral

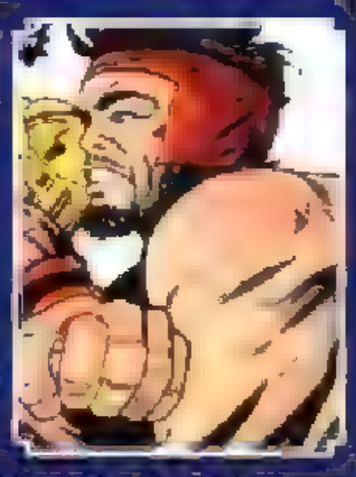
First appearance: Journey into Mystery #119, August 1965
Hogun's swashbuckling, joyful Errol Flynn-alike buddy was a dandy swordsman – like Dumas' lost Musketeer crossed with Robin Hood. An accomplished swordsman, and bragging icon of light to counter-balance Hogun's darkness.

Volstagg

First appearance: Journey into Mystery #119, August 1965
The last of the Warriors Three was a portly, cowardly braggart – Shakespeare's Falstaff with the body of an opera singer. He's brash, blustering and generally succeeds by accident rather than design, an Elizabethan buffoon who would forever boast about his mighty deeds, then attempt to hide when hostilities started and – likely as not – end up saving the day anyway. As close to comedy relief as Asgard gets, and an issue highlight – in small doses.



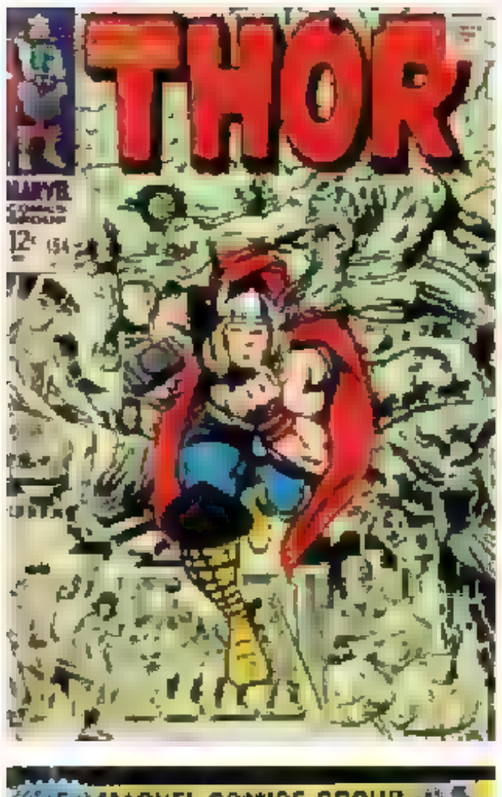
Hercules

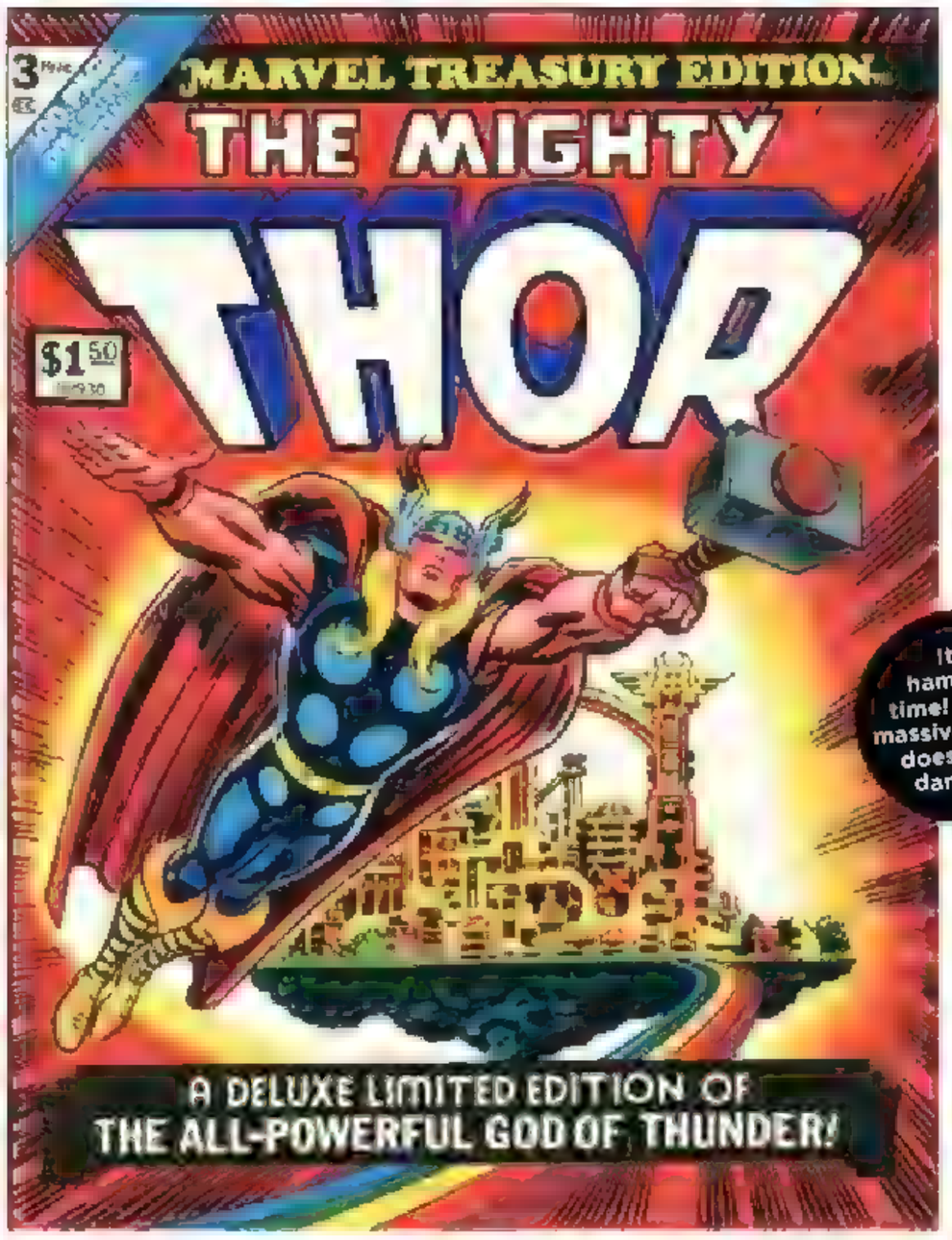


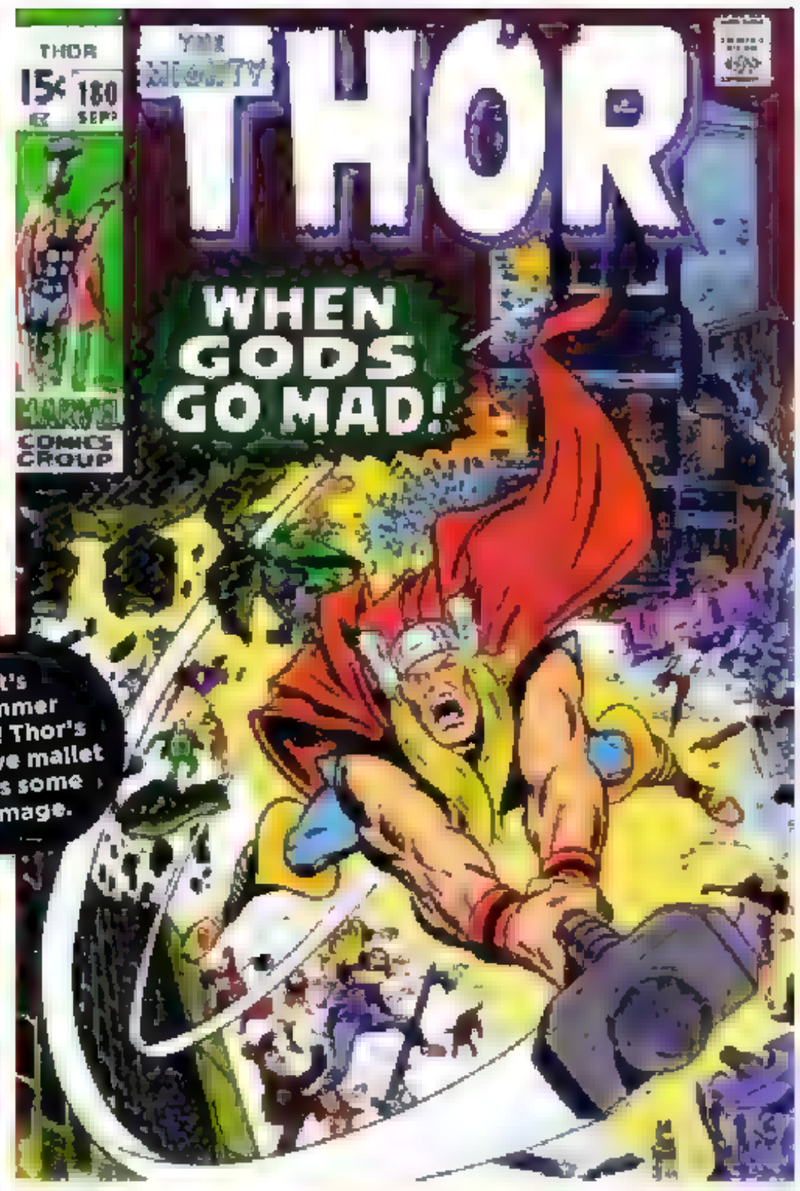
First appearance: Journey into Mystery Annual #31, 1965
With Thor such a hit, Kirby was keen to tour other pantheons, soon coming up with a superhero version of ancient Greek hero Hercules for Thor to battle in page after page of his first annual. Hercules soon became a loud, overbearing friend to the Thunder God, and a significant supporting character in the extended Thor sequence that began with *Journey into Mystery* #124, a run that would soon bring us Zeus, Pluto and other Greek gods. Colourful and fun, he would become an Avenger and a major(ish) Marvel player in time, but never really rival Thor's popularity.

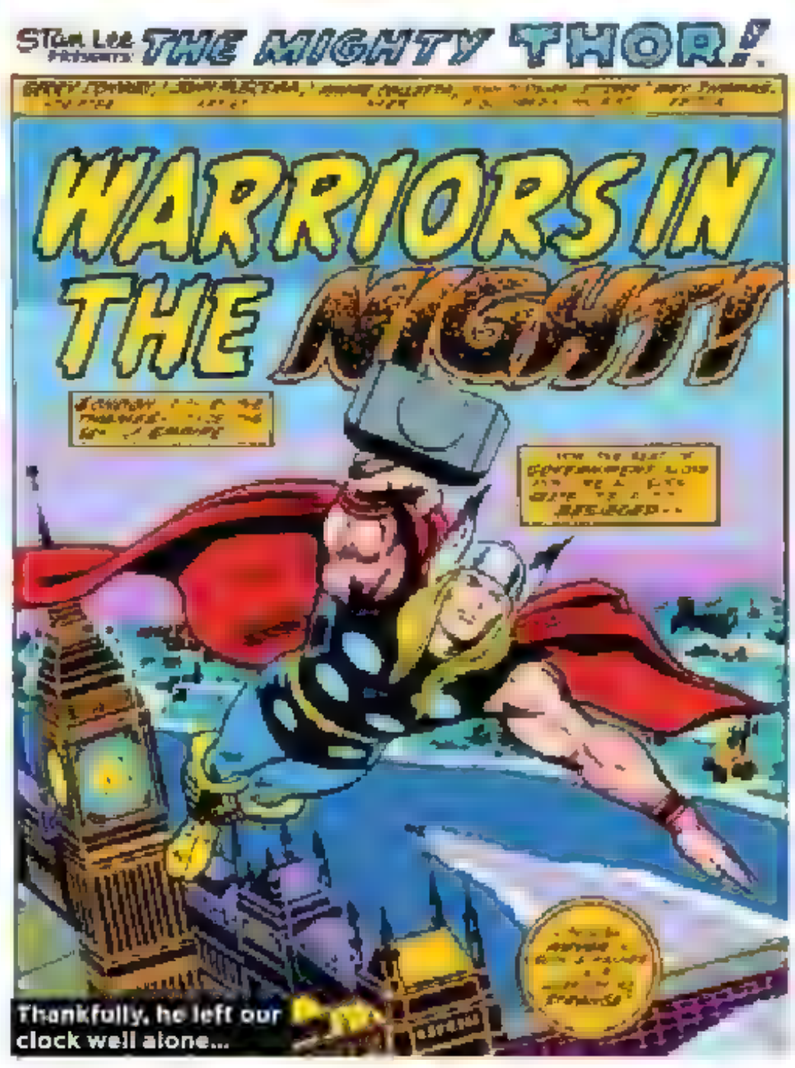
Tania Nile

First appearance: Thor #129, July 1966
Kirby loved a mystery, and one memorable case came in the form of Jane Foster's cold, odd room-mate, ultimately revealed to be a powerful alien from an advanced civilisation called The Colonizers of Rigel – individuals would find primitive new worlds (like Earth!) and claim them. Thor would eventually broker a peace, but not before becoming embroiled in a conflict between this powerful alien species and the thing they feared – the Black Galaxy and that which lurked within it, Ego the Living Planet. Though Kirby did bold and brutal like no one else, the Colonizers were exquisitely designed and showed his range – alien, elegant, physically unimposing but very much a force to be reckoned with. (Criminally, some recent depictions ruin their unique look totally.)









was this particular mid-'60s sequence on *Thor* – 23 issues all told, each inter-connected with the others and bouncing ideas off them – that announced the arrival of something new.

Marvel had been moving in this direction for some time – Lee and Ditko had been doing movie serial continuity in *Spider-Man* and, especially, the *Hulk* for a while – but never quite like this.

While those stories seemed contained to their own comics, with Spidey continuity rarely crossing over into that of other books, everything Kirby was coming up with on *Thor* seemed geared towards the expansion of the wider Marvel Universe, creating new characters, concepts and places for the other heroes to play in too. (This said, integration with the rest of the Marvel Universe has always been fairly patchy for *Thor*.)

Even the *Journey Into Mystery* issues had given us a fair few major Marvel players – Storm Giants and Frost Giants, the Grey Gargoyle and the Destroyer – but the creations coming out of Kirby now eclipsed them. We met with Hercules and Pluto, moved swiftly onto the Living Planet, made the acquaintance of the Colonizers and the High Evolutionary with his Knights of Wundagore, saw Thor lose Jane Foster but find a perhaps more matching mate in the spunky goddess Sif, then battle one of his most striking enemies, Ulik the Troll.

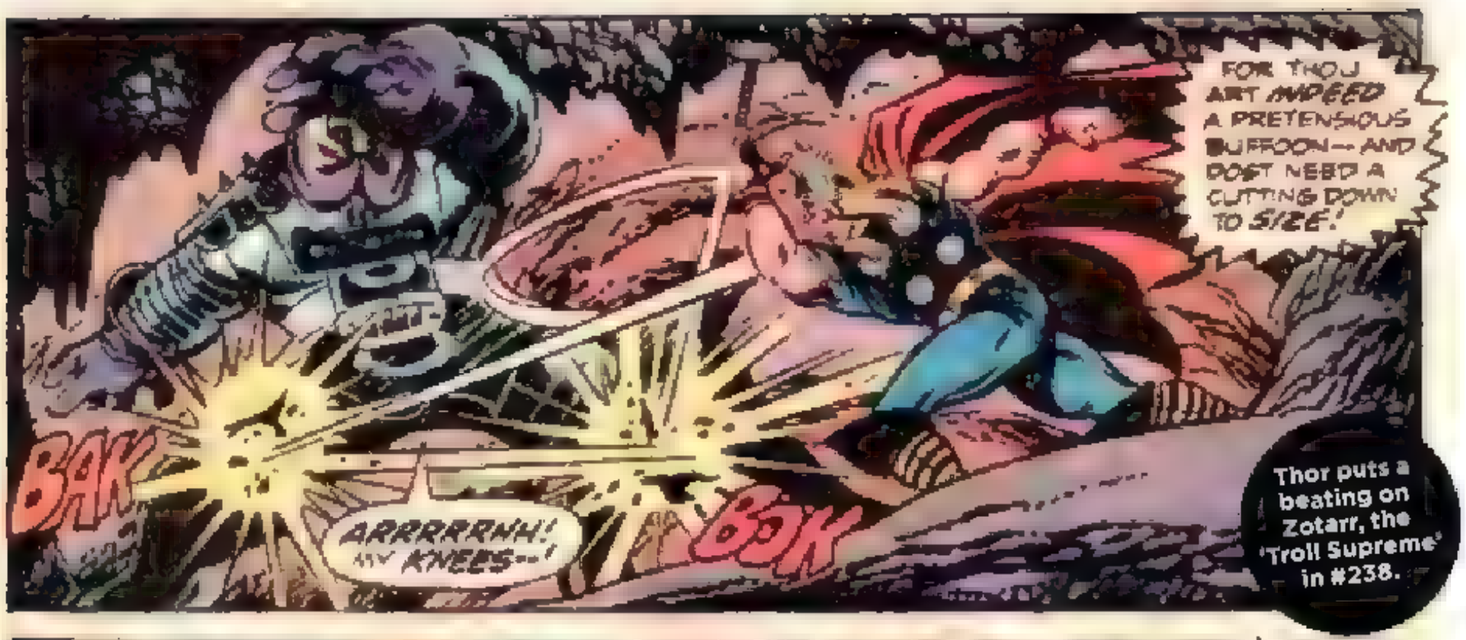
It was on these issue of Thor that Kirby really taught himself how to tell these complicated rolling stories, a skill he then took and applied to the *Fantastic Four* – with even more striking results. There he would come up with another intense and complicated sequence – this time 17 issues long, running in *FF* #44-60 – that finally cemented the Marvel Universe as the most thrilling place in comics, along the way introducing the Inhumans, the Black Panther, the Silver Surfer and Galactus. (And even on *Captain America* – a more Earth-bound hero, and suffering from a 10-pages-of-original-story-per-issue format – we still got that ultimate Nazi in the striking Red Skull, not to mention plenty of weird S.H.I.E.L.D kit and, of course, the Cosmic Cube.) The question keen Marvelites were now asking: would such heady invention never end?

'BEGONE, THOU PUNY MORTALS!'

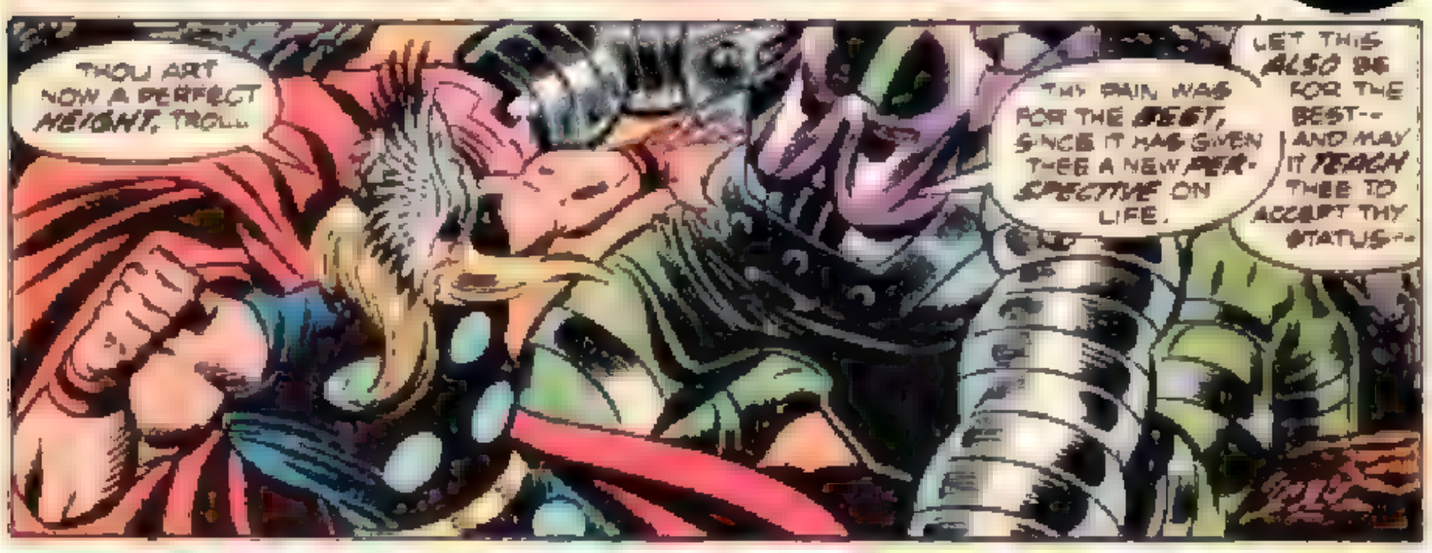
For Kirby, this new way of telling stories he first put to use on *Thor* was almost certainly not a conscious decision – it's more likely that he, quite simply, found he had too many ideas, and they each needed more space than a single issue to breathe. Still, what he was doing here was nothing less than reinventing the way comic book stories were told.

The default *Thor* storyline now tended towards the extended quest, or the build-up to some gigantic last-ditch battle against some new unknown menace from beyond – tales big enough not to get lost in the huge science fiction/fantasy cosmos he was building, brick by brick and month by month.

It was an approach that dragged up those around him. The scratchy work of inker Vince Colletta, famous for a speed achieved only by ignoring the complicated work of other pencillers – and even occasionally skipping the backgrounds to panels

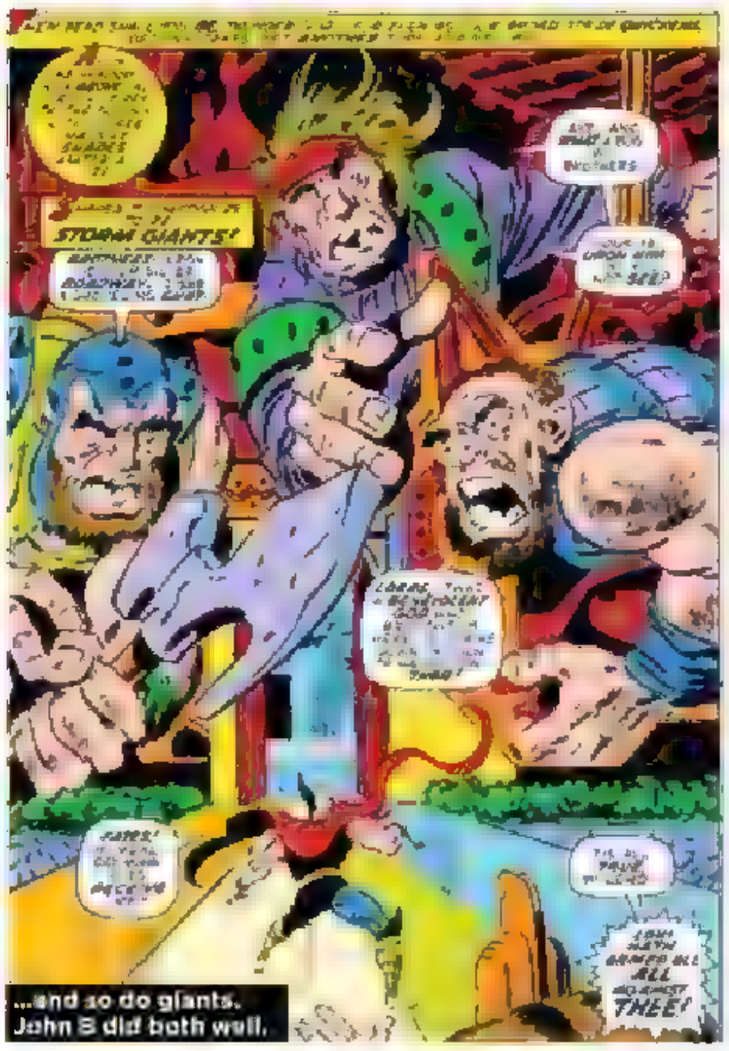


Thor puts a beating on Zotarr, the 'Troll Supreme' in #238.

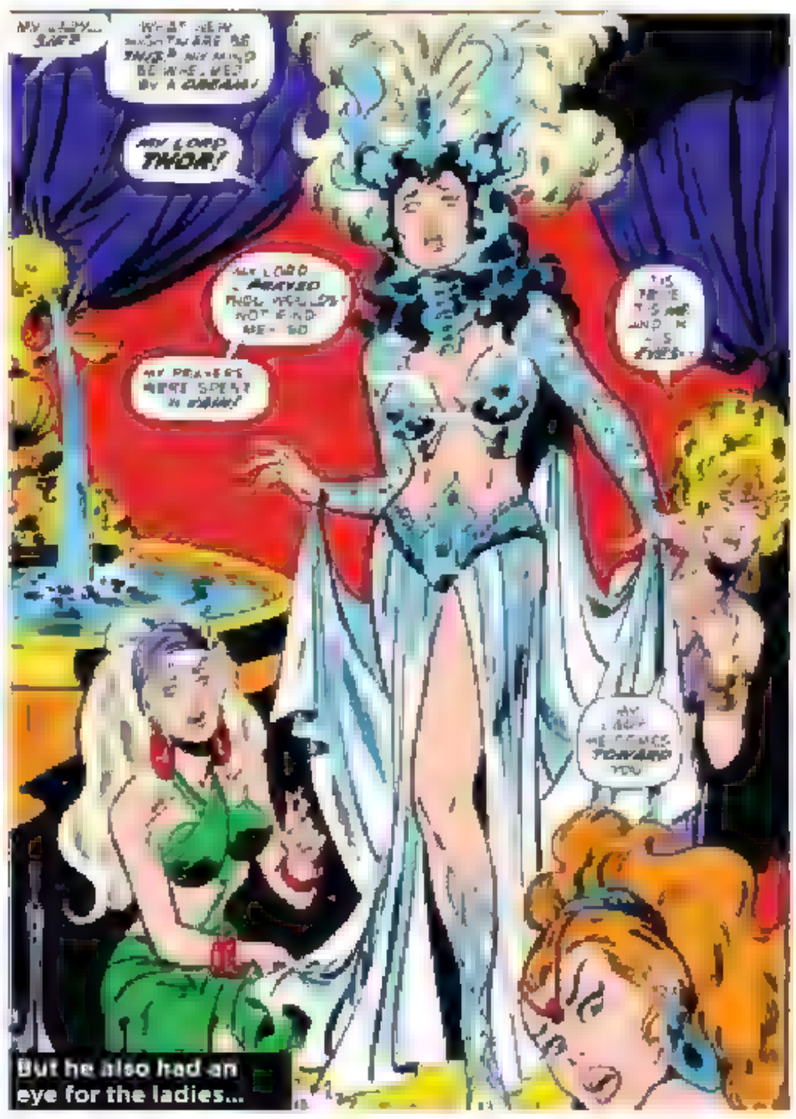

THOU ART NOW A PERFECT HEIGHT, TROLL
THY PAIN WAS FOR THE BEST, SINCE IT HAS GIVEN THEE A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE.
LET THIS ALSO BE FOR THE BEST-- AND MAY IT TEACH THEE TO ACCEPT THY STATUS--

THE MIGHTY THOR!
THE WORLD BEYOND!
IMPERIAL ODIN HATH SUMMONED ME FOR GREAT DANGER IS TO THREATEN THE REALM.
AND AS THE ALMIGHTY COMMANDS THE THUNDER GOD OBEYS!
INTRODUCING: THE MYSTERIOUS SILENT ONE
...AND OUR FIRST ISSUE!
by STAN LEE JOHN BUSCEMA JOE SINNOTT

Wolves turn up loads in 'real' Norse myth...



...and so do giants. John B did both well.


WHAT DREW JOHN BUSCEMA TO THIS? MY MIND MUST BE MISLED BY A DREAM!
MY LORD THOR!
MY LORD ODIN! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I COULD NOT FIND YOU--SO
MY PRAYERS WERE SPENT IN VAIN!
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE SEEN YOU IN TIGHTS!
MY EYES!

But he also had an eye for the ladies...

completely – became oddly appealing on *Thor*, his light, feathery lines giving the strip an intriguingly 'olde world' feel even as they robbed it of some power. And Stan Lee stepped up to the plate with alacrity too, responding to this new, bigger Kirby with a more serious-minded take on his established cod-Shakespearean turn of phrase.

Quite often it was Lee who would remind us that these weren't just superpowerful aliens, but, rather, very human gods. "The maniacal frenzy of thine attack did make me stumble," he would have Thor rage, "but the Thunder God shall stumble… no more!"

But then, suddenly, the invention seemed to slow down a little; dry up, even. It had been an incredible period, but by the end of 1966 – and with Steve Ditko now having left Marvel – a further schism was starting to make itself felt within the company. Kirby felt isolated, by most accounts, with the new Marvel more than ever led by the duo of Stan Lee and John Romita. Romita was now drawing both *Spider-Man* and *Daredevil*, after all, as well as overseeing the other

“Kirby was doing nothing less than reinventing the way comic book stories were told”

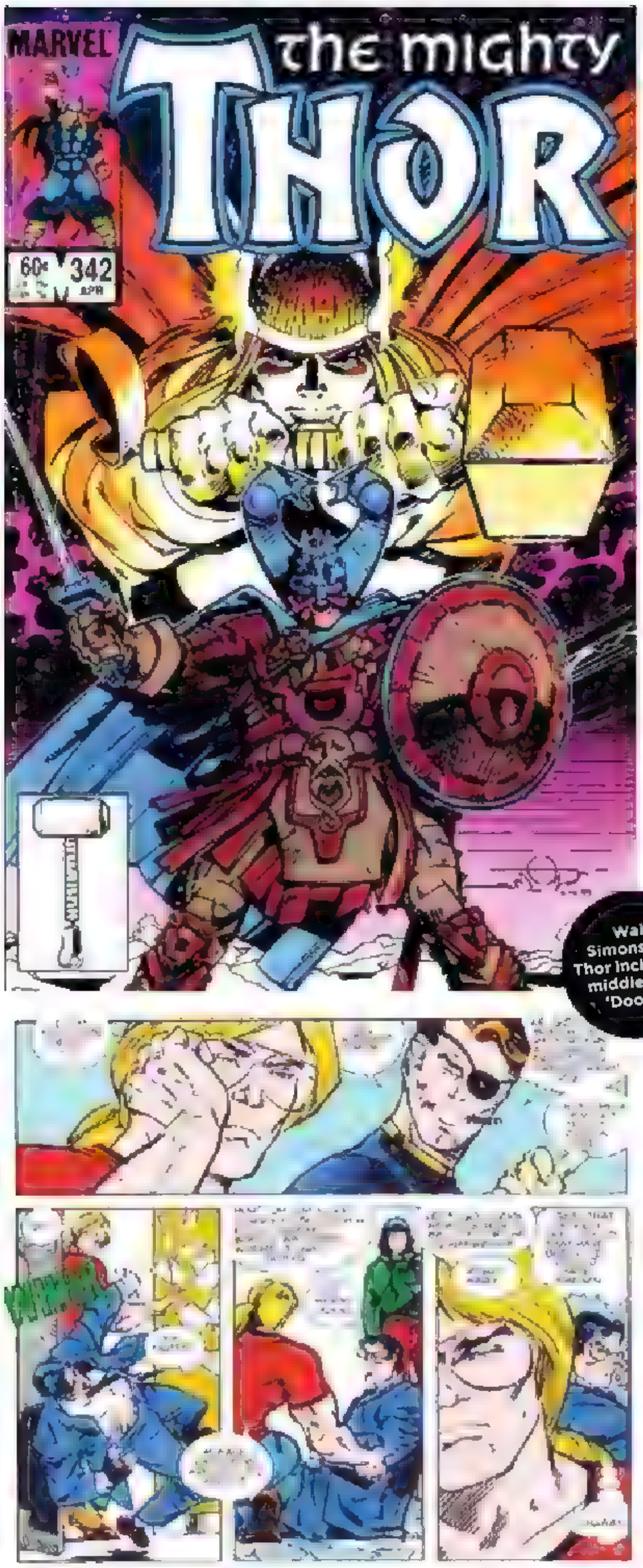
artists – and though the three Kirby books were still very much his, the rest of the line seemed increasingly distant, out of his hands.

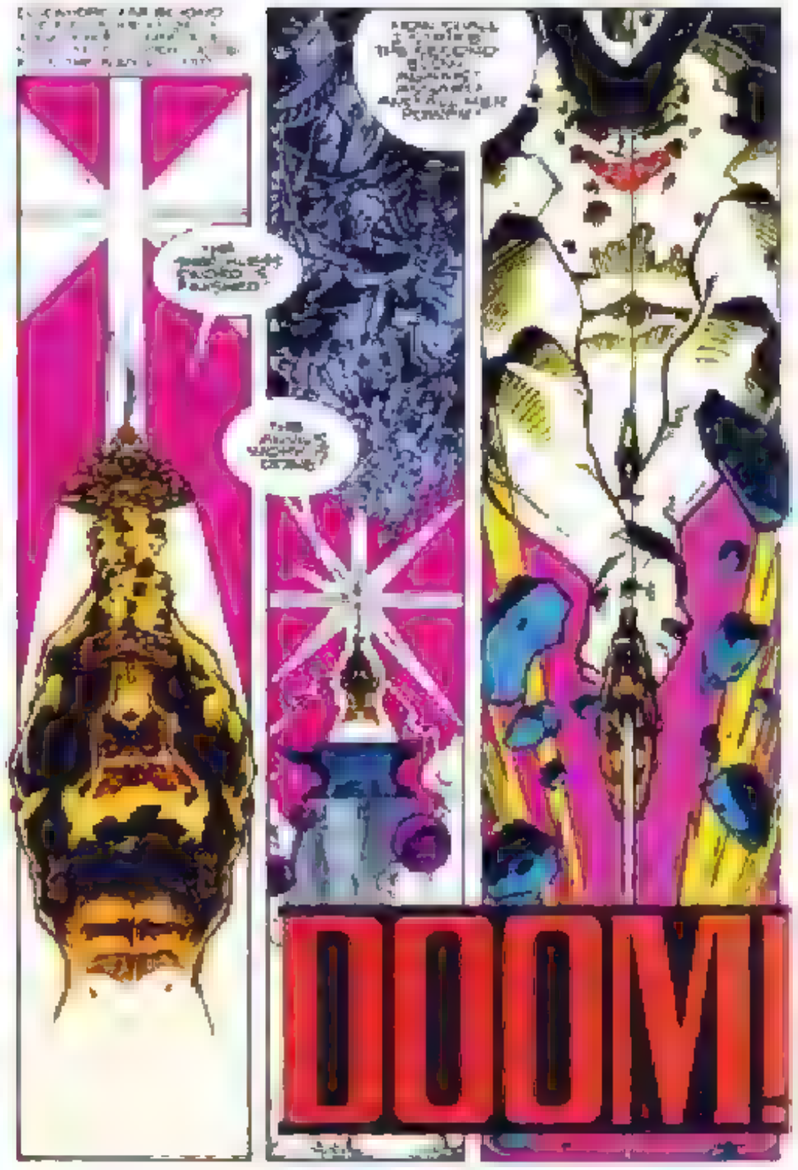
Slowly, it started to feel like Jack Kirby's heart just wasn't in it any more. *Thor* continued churning out the big stories – Ragnarok, the death of the gods, raised its head, and there were new storylines involving Galactus and the Inhumans, and introducing new characters like Him/Adam Warlock right though 1968-69 – but the intensity was dropping. Not that anyone very much noticed at first – not with the art still monolithic, the fight scenes still earthshaking. Kirby was building towards something – perhaps Ragnarok really would see the end of all these characters, to be replaced by a new series about more modern, space-age sci-fi gods?

Whatever: it wouldn't happen. Because, suddenly, Kirby was gone.

Kirby was replaced by John Buscema from #180 onwards, and Stan Lee's last issues of the book would overflow with death imagery, in stories dominated by Hela, the Norse death goddess. Then, in 1972, he too was away, never to regularly write Marvel comics again, and passing over his last two regular jobs – *Thor* and *Spider-Man* – to Gerry Conway.

Conway did well with *Spider-Man* but never quite got the same grip on *Thor* – though new science fiction elements, and a greater emphasis on space adventure, at »





Walt Simonson's Thor including, middle top, 'Doom!'

least meant the hoary old quest plots couldn't be reused. His peak came with a Loki story in #232-234, wherein the trickster god leads the forces of Asgard to invade Earth.

The following issues have their high points too, though the invention was gone, the dross

filters wide open. Once Roy Thomas took over with *Thor* #272, there was an increased emphasis on reconciling the comic book Thor with the original Norse myths – we have an origin for Asgard to thank him for – but his 30-or-so issue run went on far too long, and seemed to whimper at the end.

And so *Thor* stumbled on, a great strip living on past glories, until the arrival in 1983 of a new writer/artist with a radical new vision for the strip. It's this run that dominates all modern thinking on Thor, and totally revitalised both this comic and – to some degree at least – all of Marvel. Alongside Frank Miller's slightly earlier take on the similarly underwhelming *Daredevil*, this new Thor showed just how good mainstream superhero comics can be. The man responsible was, of course, Walt Simonson.

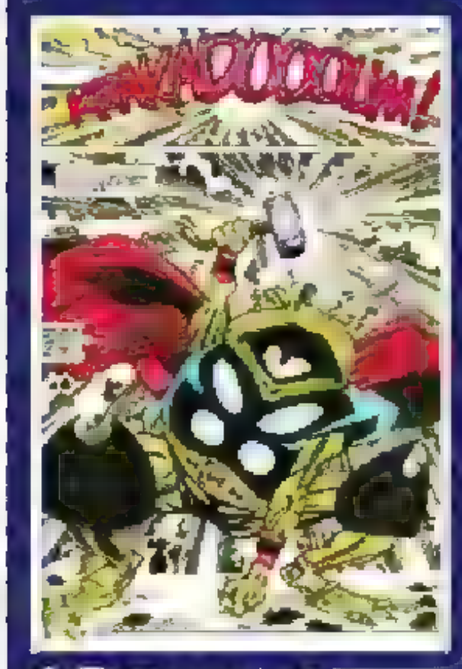
'BALDER, THY NAME IS LAUGHTER!'

Early Walt Simonson had mixed a clear, playful pleasure in cartooning and a love of the chunky and the monolithic – a part of his style that came right from Kirby – with a more slick, cynical and noticeably design-led take on superheroes; in this he was very much like Howard Chaykin. Now, in 1983, he took over *Thor* for a joyous, highly inventive, always entertaining four year run; three of them where the book commanded his compete attention, and a fourth he wrote mostly for artist Sal Buscema, who made a game attempt at the distinctive Simonson *Thor* style.

From Simonson's first issue, #337, this was a dynamic, exuberant and gleefully radical take on Marvel's Norse Gods, shipping in far more of the original myths than even Roy Thomas had done, and happy to throw away anything that had become old and boring. Out went Don Blake, by here a sad and tedious figure with little real purpose in the strip; now Thor's human alter ego was as big and blonde as he was, just Thor himself wearing slightly toned down clothes. Out, too, went much of

He Stood at Gjallerbru

Battles and Revelations
10 moments that made *Thor* great



10 Frog of Thunder
Even transformed into a frog (yes, Loki was involved once more), Thor kicks ass – as the evil rats of Central Park are about find out...

09 Doom!
Simonson's *Thor* built up tension like few comics before, and the lengthy flashes 'beyond the fields we know' to Surtur the Fire Giant preparing for war with Asgard lasted over a year before things kicked off.

08 For myself!
Loki fights on the side of right alongside Odin and Thor against the mighty Surtur: but he makes it clear with his battle-cry – "For myself!" – where his loyalties really lie.

07 Look to the sky!
Thor bluffs Loki: as his hammer, magically destined to return to him, shoots from space towards Thor's hand, the Thunder God places Loki's head in harm's way. Do as I say or it'll go straight through you!

06 Now ends... the universe!
Kirby's monster comic background was put to full use on *Thor*, a classic bad guy being Mangog, a bizarre alien minotaur created from the pure hatred of billions of beings Odin has killed!

05 Whom the Gods would destroy!
Thor and Hercules go at it, throwing giant construction machinery and massive tyres at each other in a classic multi-page Kirby brawl; he'd do more dramatic fights, but this one showed the way.

04 Death be my helpmeet!
Forced by Loki's machinations into action, a reluctant, tearful Balder – now a fat pacifist, utterly underestimated by the army of demons out to kill him – takes up the sword once more.

03 Bada Boom!
Horse-faced alien warrior Beta Ray Bill – the perfect synthesis of Simonson and Kirby – remains one of the most perfect new Marvel inventions of the past 30 years.

02 The boyhood of Thor!
It's with *Tales Of Asgard* that *Thor* really gets good, Lee & Kirby shaming the lesser lights then running the main strip. They really started to explore the background inherent to a Thunder God.

01 He stood at Gjallerbru
Skurge the Executioner – the Enchantress' long-term lackey – holds a bridge to cover a mass Asgardian escape from Hel while the hordes of the dead assault it – and a long-lived but one-dimensional villain is reborn even as he dies.

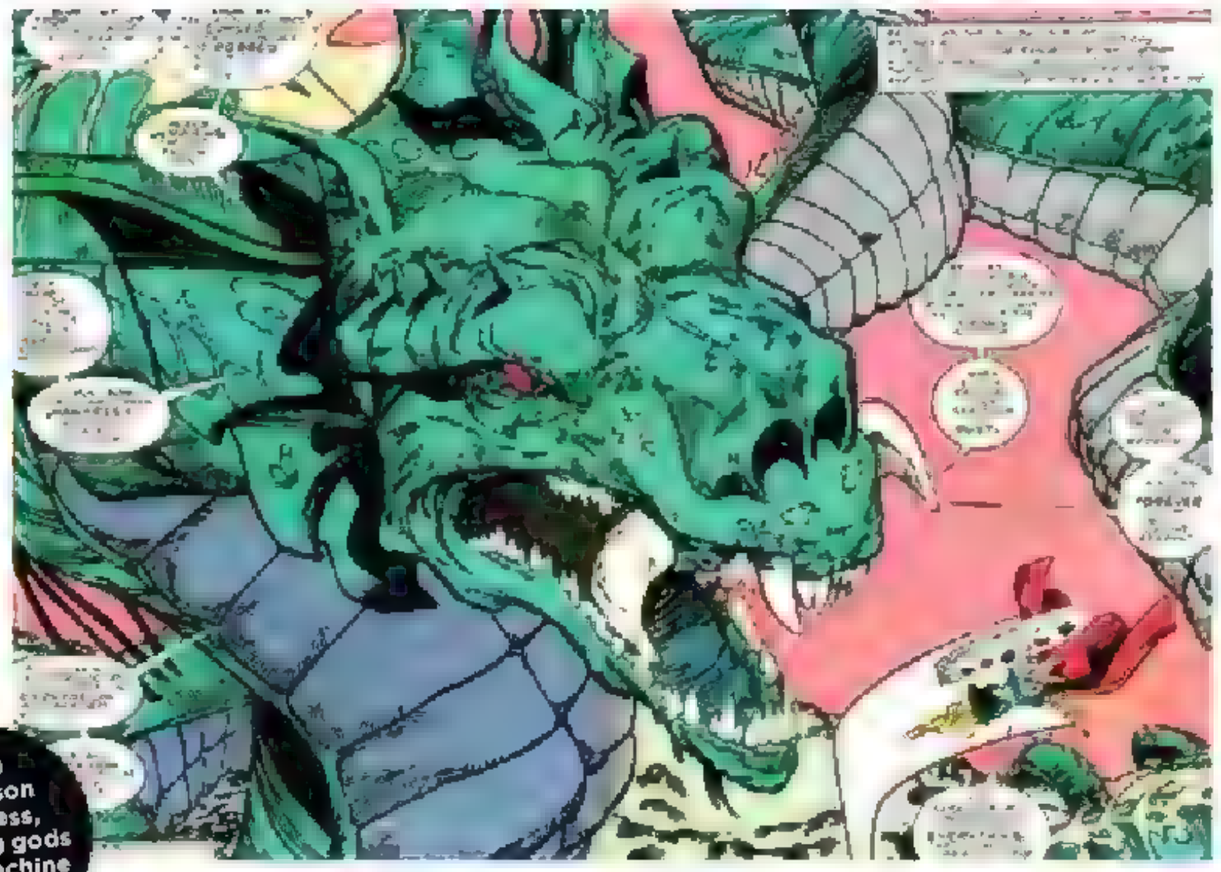
the moping, pity-me Thunder God of recent years – he'd become as much Marvel's Hamlet as Captain America had been years before, forever worrying about this or that – to be replaced by a more dynamic, lusty figure.

By cranking up the action and the intrigue, introducing weird new rivals – like that horse-faced alien with similar powers, Beta Ray Bill, cloaked in Kirby Krackle in pure tribute to Thor's creator – and giving the strip's mighty supporting cast far more to do, the issues began at a sprint and kept accelerating. By replacing Thor himself for the very early ones, then bringing him back as a rough-edged Viking king-in-waiting, the entire milieu was reinvigorated: it was almost as if all the old

“Simonson's was a dynamic, exuberant and gleefully radical take on Marvel's Norse gods”

Thor tales had been legends told of these guys, and now we were meeting the real 'people' for the first time.

There was some Scandinavian in Simonson, a man who clearly wanted things to look right – and his version of Asgard and its surrounds, while very different, quickly became the most compelling since Kirby's. Simonson drew straw and wood and leather well, replacing some of the SF sweep of Kirby with more realistic Viking architecture, just on an impossibly vast scale. His buildings were based on Medieval churches and ancient Celtic halls, and the lettering followed »



More Simonson goodness, including gods using machine guns!

Olivier Coipel's take (below right) on Thor.

suit. More than any other comic – except, perhaps, Chaykin's *American Flagg!* – where the word balloons sat, what fonts were used and how the sound effects were drawn all became crucial: you could recognise a *Thor* page immediately, without even looking at the pictures.

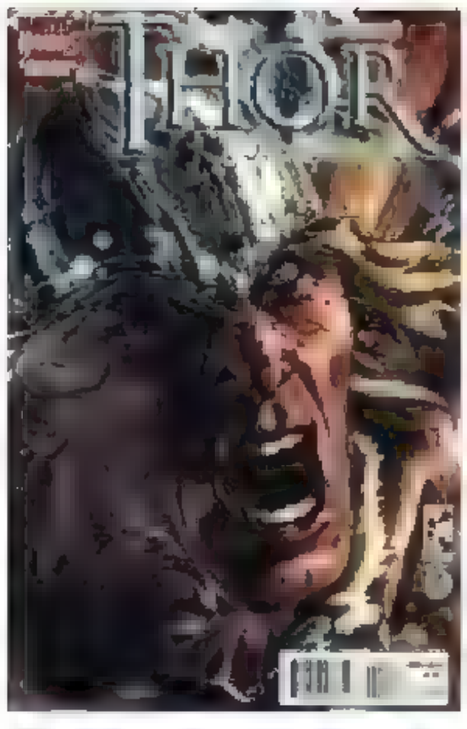
At once tragic and funny, Simonson mixed serious takes on the original myths with the goofy – Thor is transformed into a giant 'Thunder Frog' for three issues #364-366, while the noble Baldur becomes fat and useless and, in time, Thor even grows a beard – but the story never becomes ludicrous. There was a fairytale logic at play here that made perfect sense in the superhero-mythological universe Simonson had, by this point, made utterly his own.

Arguably even better than the Lee/Kirby run – and certainly more sophisticated – this period of *Thor* mixed a sense of awe and nobility with sneaky jokes and intricate plots that have never been bettered; *Game of Thrones* fans would be right at home. These were romances in the chivalric sense of Medieval literature – though Thor is always centre stage, we're reminded of what everyone else is up to constantly, and the complex soap web they weave is perfectly geared towards keeping us guessing. Simonson's Loki, meanwhile, is a charming, sexy and utterly devious master of manipulation – a missing Lannister brother, perhaps? – who swaps sides constantly.

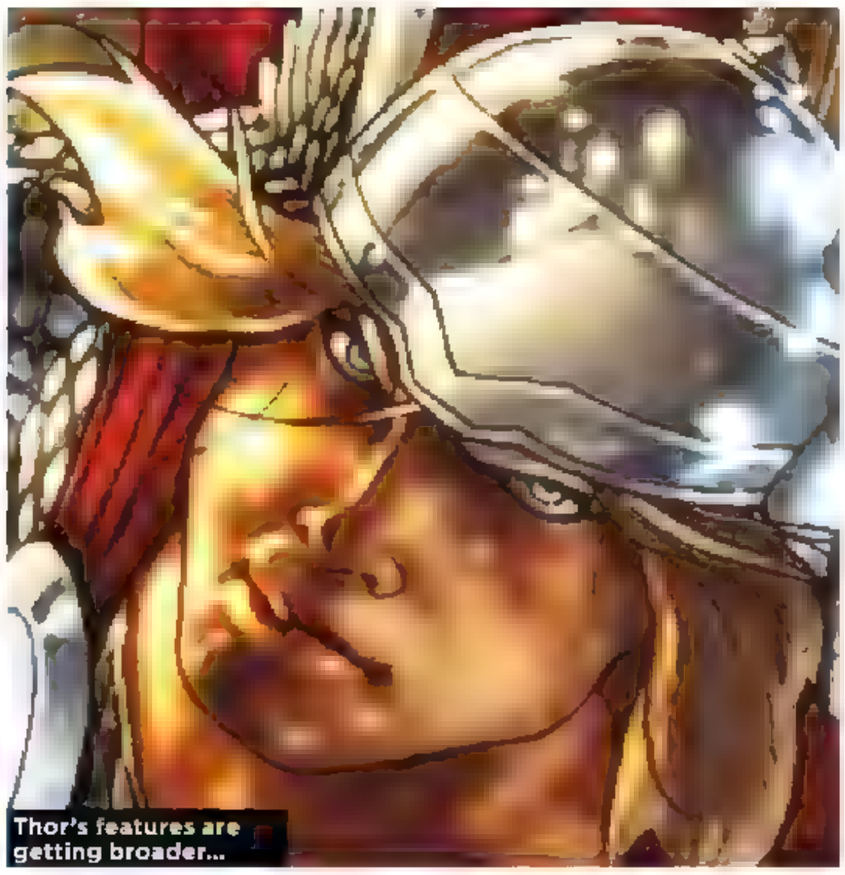
The early stories – Simonson's first year, kicking off with the Beta Ray Bill tale – are the best remembered, but later ones are perhaps even better (have a look at #345-348, featuring some very dangerous Elves and some of the inspiration for the new film). Though things go downhill when Simonson retires from drawing the strip himself, it ends on a high note too; indeed, some think his return to art duties for the rousing finale in #379-382 constitute the very greatest *Thor* issue of all.

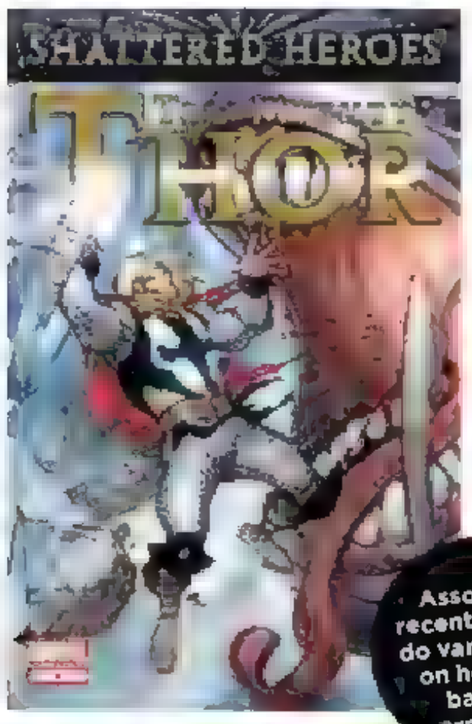
Following Simonson on Thor was no easy task, and if later runs by the likes of Tom DeFalco inevitably fall short – integrating the character further into the mainstream Marvel Universe than Simonson ever had, and turning him into more of a regular superhero – his plan to merge our hero with another human, this one architect Eric Masterson, did at least add something new to proceedings. (Masterson would eventually become a Thor-lite called Thunderstrike, one of Marvel's many tedious new '90s heroes; his own series lasted 24 so-so issues.)

Teamed with artist Ron Frenz for much of his run, DeFalco's go at *Thor* never really rises above the acceptable – but you can't deny that it had staying power, the team turning out almost as many issues as Lee and Kirby – and it's arguably stronger than most of what

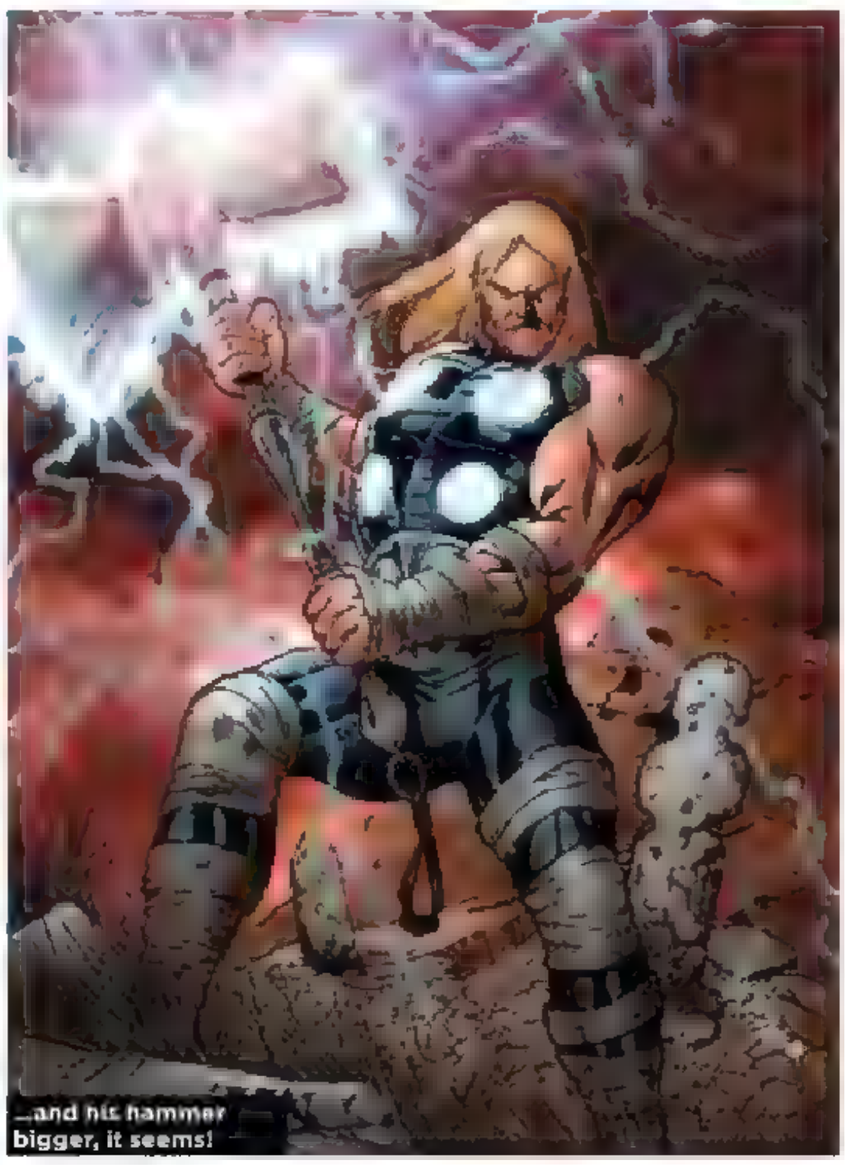


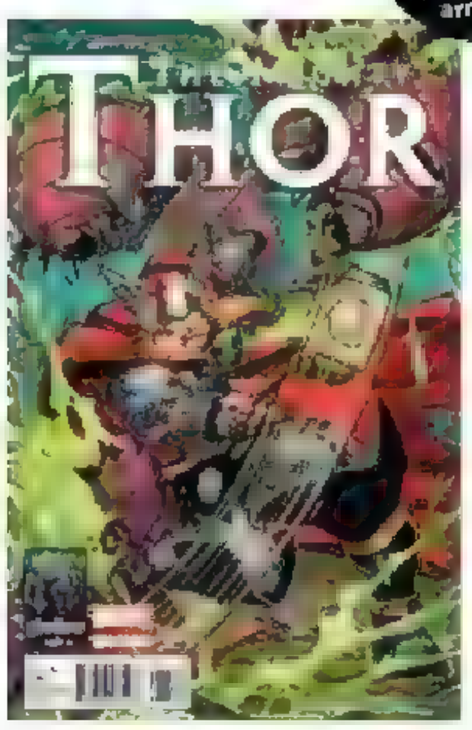
Ultimate Thor by Bryan Hitch.


Thor's features are getting broader...



Assorted recent artists do variations on heavier battle armour.


...and his hammer bigger, it seems!



followed (a few brightish spots, like a short Warren Ellis run, aside) until the character disappeared from view following the awful *Heroes Reborn* crossover/debacle of 1996-97.

'EVIL ONE, DEFEND THYSELF!'

Thor would return to the mainstream Marvel Universe the following year for a new series, lasting 85 uneventful issues, mostly written by Dan Jurgens, before the latest major reinvention that still dominates the way the character is portrayed today.

In September 2007, a third new Thor volume began with a *Thor* #1 written by famed TV writer J Michael Straczynski and pencilled by Olivier Coipel: though rather slow, it was powerful, well-crafted stuff, with a resurrected, heavily armoured Thor now on a quest to recreate Asgard and recover his fellow gods. Each was now living a mortal life, with no knowledge of who they once were – the exact situation Thor himself had found himself in was when we first met him all those years ago.

Ever since, Thor has been on something of a creative high, with many of the best of Marvel's current young gun writers – notably Matt Fraction, Kieron Gillen and, most recently, Jason Aaron – guiding him through adventures that cleverly reference both the original myths and Marvel's version of Thor, though keeping track of it all is a quest in itself. Since the JMS issues, we've seen the title change its numbering – jumping from #12 to #600 – then launch a quartet of splinter series, rename itself *Journey Into Mystery*, replace Thor with Loki as the lead, and splinter into two books (*The Mighty Thor* with Thor and *JIM* with Loki) before the Marvel Now! relaunch saw us start from scratch again, with yet another new volume, *Thor: God of Thunder*.

Phew! It's exhausting keeping everything straight, but the good news is that almost anything written since 2007 – Gillen's Loki stories, especially – have been a good read; it's been a more consistent half-dozen years, in fact, than have been enjoyed by almost any other Marvel hero. Couple this with the success of the 2011 *Thor* film – and Thor's continuing high profile through the Avengers movie and the upcoming movie *Thor. The Dark World*, due in October – and the character has rarely been in finer fettle.

It's nothing more than he deserves, of course, for no character is bigger, bolder, more bombastic – more purely superhero, for all his oddball twists – than Thor.

"You could recognise a *Thor* page immediately, without even looking at the pictures"

*For more on the first classic Walt Simonson issues of **Thor**, flip to page 114; and for the upcoming big-screen extravaganza, **Thor: The Dark World**, go to page 54.*

VENGEANCE IS MINE

Some creators – Pat Mills, John Wagner – have *2000 AD* in the veins. So it's long seemed with Al Ewing, favoured *Judge Dredd* writer and co-creator of everything from *The Zaucer Of Zilk* to *Zombo*. Except now he's branching out... **By Stephen Jewell**

Angry green men land in Mega-City One.

The ethnically diverse *Mighty Avengers.*

Zombo: Ewing's take on the zombie genre.

Damnation Station: expect more soon.

All images © Marvel Rebellion/2000 AD IDW

For the past decade, he's been a constant presence in the pages of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic – and one of its most celebrated creators, a writer who really 'gets' Judge Dredd, and has been increasingly trusted with those major Dredd-verse stories that character co-creator John Wagner hasn't got the time or inclination to handle.

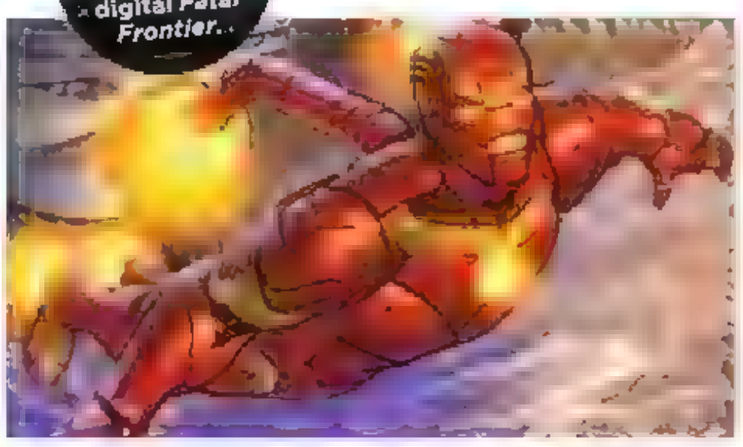
But from September, Al Ewing is swapping the mean streets of Mega-City One for the superhero-filled skies of the Marvel Universe as he relaunches *Mighty Avengers* – a core Avengers title since 2007, and one initially intended by then-Avengers writer Brian Michael Bendis to detail the exploits of the most powerful, establishment, government-sanctioned superheroes – alongside artists Greg Land and Jay Leisten.

Following hot on the heels of his first encounter with Earth's Mightiest Heroes – in his recent two-part *Avengers Assemble* arc – and his announcement as co-writer with Kieron Gillen on a weekly Iron Man digital story, *Iron Man: Fatal Frontier*, the York-based scribe is, it seems, now jumping head-first into the heart of the Marvel U. And he doesn't seem averse to attracting a bit of controversy as he does so.

In his issues of *Avengers Assemble*, the 35-year-old memorably (if temporarily) introduced a new Captain Britain in the form of London-born Muslim, and erstwhile Excalibur, Faiza Hussain. She was a popular figure from Paul Cornell's recent, lamented *Captain Britain And MI-13* title, but hardly a big name with wider Marvel fandom, and now Ewing seems about to showcase a further raft of lesser-known Marvel heroes.

Indeed, long before it hit the comic shop shelves, *Mighty Avengers* was attracting plenty of feverish speculation and headlines over its largely non-white line-up, which includes Luke Cage, Monica 'Spectrum' Rambeau, White Tiger and the Falcon as »

"I wanted to go smaller by doing a book about heroes helping their community"



well as She-Hulk, the latest mystery figure in the Ronin costume and a curiously 'superior' Spider-Man.

"Basically Tom Brevoort contacted me after he'd seen my *Avengers Assemble* issues and asked me if I wanted to do it," recalls Ewing, referring to Marvel's executive editor. "He gave me a list of characters, so I thought it over and then I wrote a pitch for it."

Not that Ewing is done with the stoney-faced lawman just yet, as he's also penning IDW's four-part *Mars Attacks Judge Dredd* for artist John McCrea, in addition to collaborating with Mark Harrison on the final series of *2000 AD* favourite *Damnation Station*. Though he's already a big name with a large section of British comic book fandom, 2013 looks like being the year Al Ewing really makes his mark on the international scene.

Comic Heroes: Like many other British writers, you've honed your talents in *2000 AD* before graduating to American comics...

Al Ewing: It's just how things panned out. I've kind of fulfilled all my ambitions already in terms of the whole writing-your-favourite-corporate-comic thing and writing-your-favourite-character thing, so now I'm kind of freed from that, in a sense. But I'm very happy to be getting known by the people who read Marvel, since that means that – when I do get to my creator-owned work – more people will hopefully want to buy it. The end goal at the moment is to own some things, and I have something in the works at the moment that I will own, along with the artist, so that's good.

CH: You're largely known for hard-nosed sci-fi tales like *Judge Dredd* and *Zombo*. Are you also a fan of the capes and cowls?

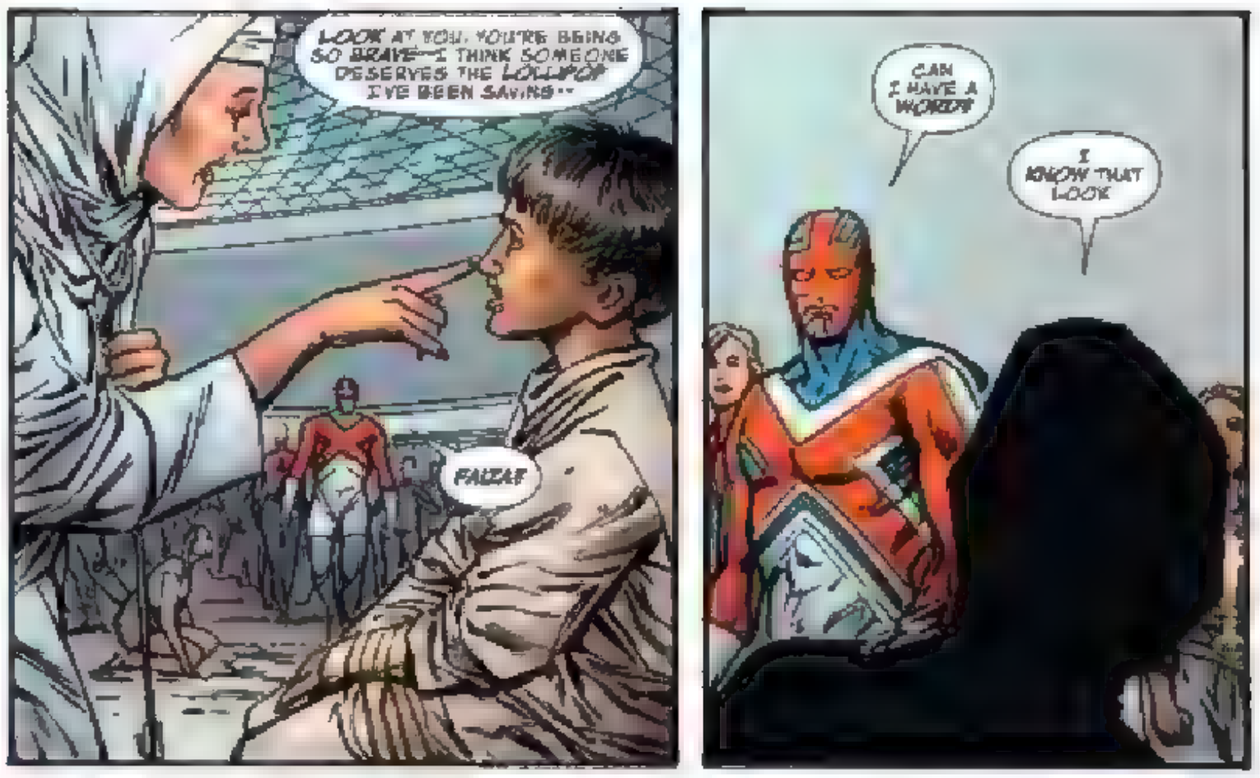
AE: I quite like superheroes. I think they can be a bit dodgy in some ways, though, especially now. The whole thing about muscled gods solving problems through violence is very suspect to begin with, and increasingly these narratives have them placed above governments, or deciding policy in matters of global or universal significance from inside locked rooms with these little cabals featuring Tony Stark or with Batman in the leader's chair. But the general concept is sound. It's someone with the ability to help, assisting people who need that help, in a flamboyant, exciting, reader-friendly way designed for 'kids of all ages'. That seems like something worthwhile.

CH: Your *Avengers Assemble* issues really made their mark. Would you like to return to Faiza Hussain, or resurrect any of Marvel's other British characters?

AE: I'd love to and, if I did get the chance, I would definitely have Faiza inherit the Captain Britain title for good. That came about because it just seemed like the obvious thing to do – Brian was going on a suicide mission, and, as we've seen, Captain Britain dying is very bad for morale. That line of thinking got me to Faiza as his obvious successor.

And it seems to have made a lot of people very happy, which is nice – a few people were miffed that it only happened in a closed-off timeline, but, y'know, that was the issue I was working on. At least the idea is out there and has been proven to have a lot of fan

Ewing's headline-grabbing *AA*.


LOOK AT YOU. YOU'RE BEING SO BRAVE—I THINK SOMEONE DESERVES THE LOLLIPOP I'VE BEEN SAVING--
FAIZA!
CAN I HAVE A WORD?
I KNOW THAT LOOK

THAT'S THE LOOK YOU GET WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING DRASTIC.
WHO, ME?
NEVER.
FAIZA HUSSAIN, BY THE POWER VESTED IN ME BY MERLIN, ROMA, OBERON AND OTHERWORLD...
...NOT TO MENTION TONY WILSON, BAGPUSS, THE ASHES, ET CETERA, ET CETERA...
...I HEREBY DUB THEE CAPTAIN BRITAIN.
WAIT!
BRIAN, THAT'S NOT FUNNY. I'M NOT ABOUT TO LET YOU--
PLEASE, FAIZA
I THINK...I KNOW WE CAN DO THIS. WE CAN STOP HIM. HERE. TODAY.
BUT...I HONESTLY DON'T KNOW IF I'M GOING TO SURVIVE IT AND CAPTAIN BRITAIN HAS TO.
YOU'RE EXCALIBUR. THE SWORD THAT HEALS. THE HERO WHO NEVER HATES. NEVER KILLS.
NOBODY ELSE IF CAN BE
OH IT'S.

Paul Cornell made Faiza Hussain a star.

support, so hopefully another writer will run with that ball if I don't.

CH: *Mighty Avengers* is joining the likes of *Avengers*, *New Avengers* and *Young Avengers* on the racks. How will it differ tonally?
AE: It'll be less about the super-big picture than the front-running Avengers titles. Both of those are about incredibly cosmic, universe-spanning events and multiversal significances, which is obviously fantastic, and one of the things that Jonathan Hickman does best.

I wanted to go smaller by doing a book about heroes helping their community – locally, globally or what-have-you. A book where the most important thing a hero can do is to help a person in trouble. And that trouble could be world-devouring demons bursting up through the streets, or it could be not having enough food to get your family through the month because the car you need for your job broke down and you can't afford both.

If there's a main theme to the book it's that we're stronger together than we are apart, which is a nice message for a team book.

“I would definitely have Faiza inherit the Captain Britain title for good”

CH: *Mighty Avengers* spins out of Marvel crossover, '*Infinity*'. Are you liaising closely with that series' author, Jonathan Hickman, or *Uncanny Avengers* writer Rick Remender?
AE: Things are being run past them, and their things are being run past me, so the emails are flying around and things are coordinating. My number one goal is getting that first three-parter to line up as perfectly as possible with what Jonathan Hickman has planned, while at the same time delivering a story that's worthy of the name *Mighty Avengers* and that embraces the themes I'm going for.

CH: Did you have a hand in deciding what characters were going to make up the ranks of *Mighty Avengers*, especially as it now includes so many ethnic minorities?
AE: Tom Brevoort basically came to me with the team, which was the group we've got now plus a couple more, including Wolverine. I just didn't have the room for him though – which is okay, as he's so busy anyway. And it was deliberate from the start that this would be a more diverse team than readers are perhaps used to seeing.

CH: You've said that you especially enjoy writing Monica Rambeau, who takes charge of the team...
AE: When I was a kid, she was the leader of the Avengers. The first Marvel comics I »

MY WAND!
THE MYTHICAL MYSTICAL WAND OF THE ZAUCER! FORGED IN THE INKLING OF A TWINKLING STAR!
TWIRLING AND SWIRLING FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION OF ZAUCERS, IT ACTS TO AMPLIFY THE ALREADY POTENT POWERS OF THE USER
ERROL RANE WAS ONE MUCH LIKE IT HIMSELF — BUT HE SEEKS TO AUGMENT IT WITH ANOTHER TO DOUBLE HIS POWERS, AND MAKE HIS DREAD DREAMS COME TRUE
RIGHT
TROUBLE
IDW
2000 AD
The Zaucer of Zilk
Ewing and McCarthy's weird and wonderful The Zaucer Of Zilk...

Fan favourite – Damnation Station.
YOU BROKE THE CODE! YOU BETRAYED THE LEGION! MY LEGION!
JE VAIS ARRACHER VOS COUILLES --
GRAND-PERE!

started reading were the UK reprints of stuff like *Secret Wars* and the *Spider-Man* of that period. It was like, 'Oh, that's the Avengers leader, she's cool, she can do all this stuff.'

And then, on the strength of that, I ended up getting the Roger Stern-era *Avengers*, which was available for 40p a go from a newsagent next to the barbershop. It was just the natural order of things that you had the Avengers, which was Hercules and Captain America and Black Knight and all these other people, and then Captain Marvel – as Monica Rambeau was then known – who was the leader. So it just seems automatic that she's got a leadership position again now. Anything else seems, to me at least, kind of out of character for her.

CH: You're joined on *Mighty Avengers* by erstwhile *Iron Man* penciller Greg Land...

AE: I'm working 'Marvel style' with Greg, which is always fun, and it's great seeing what he comes up with for each new page. He's a very glam artist, but there's a solidity to his work as well that I enjoy, and with Jay Leisten on inks both these qualities really come out.

CH: So what can we expect from the first handful of issues?

AE: The first three issues obviously deal with 'Infinity', and all the horribleness with Thanos that that involves. So that's going to be on a pretty epic scale, with alien attacks, demonic eruptions and various big water-cooler moments. Then, for the next couple of issues, we're concentrating more on setting up the status quo for the team – we get to see the HQ, the transport and how they get about, plus a couple of the big new enemies. It's important that they go up against some big-time established Marvel bad guys, as it gives the book a sense of legitimacy.

But at the same time, new villains need to be created for the book to give it some lasting impact, so I'm trying to get a good balance.

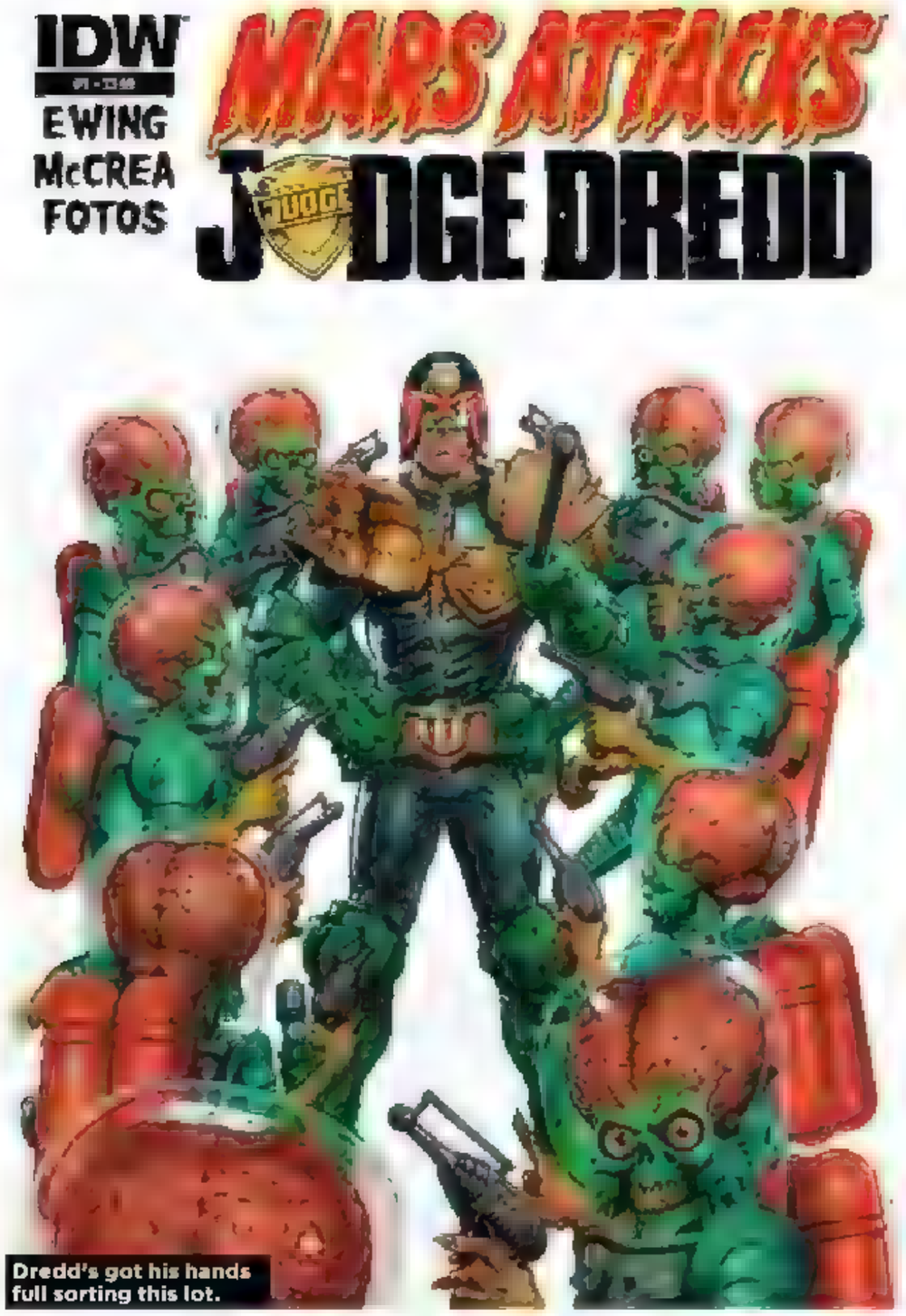
CH: Also coming out in September is *Mars Attacks Judge Dredd*, which fits into the IDW *Dredd* continuity as opposed to the classic *2000 AD* take on Mega-City One...

AE: I tend to think of it as 'Ultimate Dredd', which means I can play about with some of the old continuity and bring it back in new ways. Don Uggie Apelino [a genetically altered intelligent ape crimelord, who's been a minor Dredd villain for decades now] is in there as, essentially, the Martians are infiltrating the big crime organisations rather than attacking outright. That's because Dredd's world is so much more able to put up a fight than ours. Dredd's going to have to use his investigative skills as well as his ability to kick bottom.

> **“*Mars Attacks* is probably closer to *Aliens* or *Predator* than the superhero crossovers”**

CH: Dredd has participated in big-name crossovers before, notably with *Batman*, *Aliens* and *Predator*. How does this compare?

AE: That'll be up to the readers to determine! Hopefully they'll like it. In terms of the match-up, *Mars Attacks* is probably closer to *Aliens* or *Predator* than the superhero crossovers – the alien threat can fit more comfortably into Dredd's world. After all, aliens aren't so different from the Starborn Thing. On the other hand, the superheroes



THE ARCHAIC RELIGIOUS TERMINOLOGY SHOULD HAVE TIPPED ME OFF. THAT'S HOW YOU PROGRAM THEM. ISN'T IT?
TOTAL INDOCTRINATION FROM THE CLONING TANK ON. IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR THEM TO LOVE THE MEG — THEY'VE GOT TO WORSHIP IT AS THEIR GOD.
'THE GOD CITY.'

have to be served equally by the story – the aliens can just comfortably be adversaries without disappointing fans, since they're usually in that role already in their own movies or, in the case of the Martians, in their gum card sets.

CH: Both *Judge Dredd* and *Mars Attacks* are famous for their distinctive black humour, so they have that in common at least...

AE: *Dredd* is perhaps a little darker and more angry. The humour in *Dredd* started out as an extrapolation of the real world, and taking things to ridiculous extremes. But, increasingly, it's just building on stuff that is going on right now – in terms of the increasing loss of our rights and civil liberties and the ongoing ruination of the world around us thanks to our blindness to our own culpability – and sticking them onto the page in a sci-fi context.

On the other hand, there are similarities too. In both cases, ordinary people are the victims and the butts of the joke, being preyed on by these terrifying forces that happen to be the protagonists.

CH: What does artist John McCrea bring to the table?

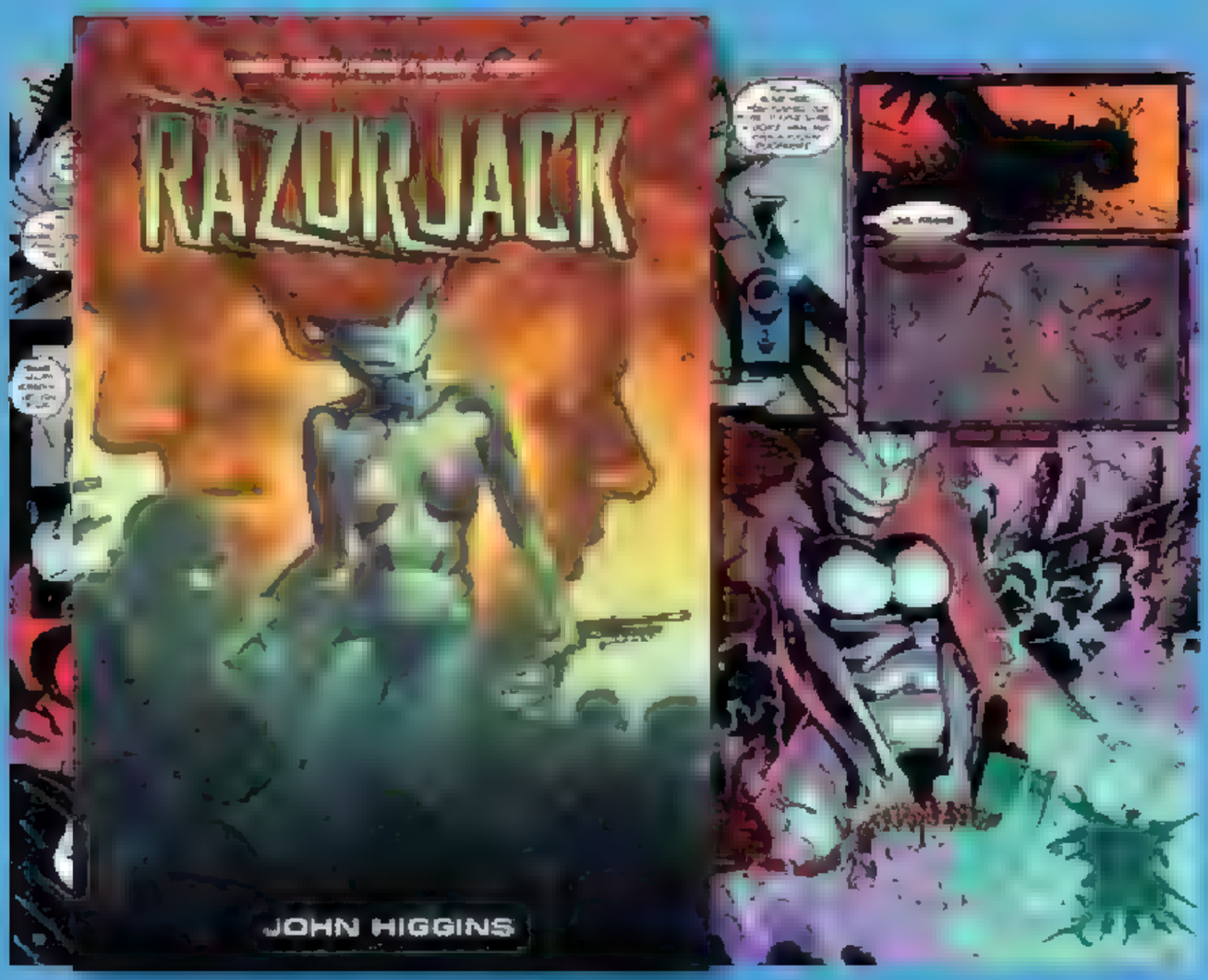
AE: He's had a lot of experience with both Dredd and the Martians, so I'm feeling comfortable throwing just about everything from either of those worlds at him. Plus, he's a really good artist! His style adds a lot of pace and humour to the series, but his storytelling is perfect. He can do the serious notes just as well as the grotesqueries, so it's not an either/or kind of situation with him.

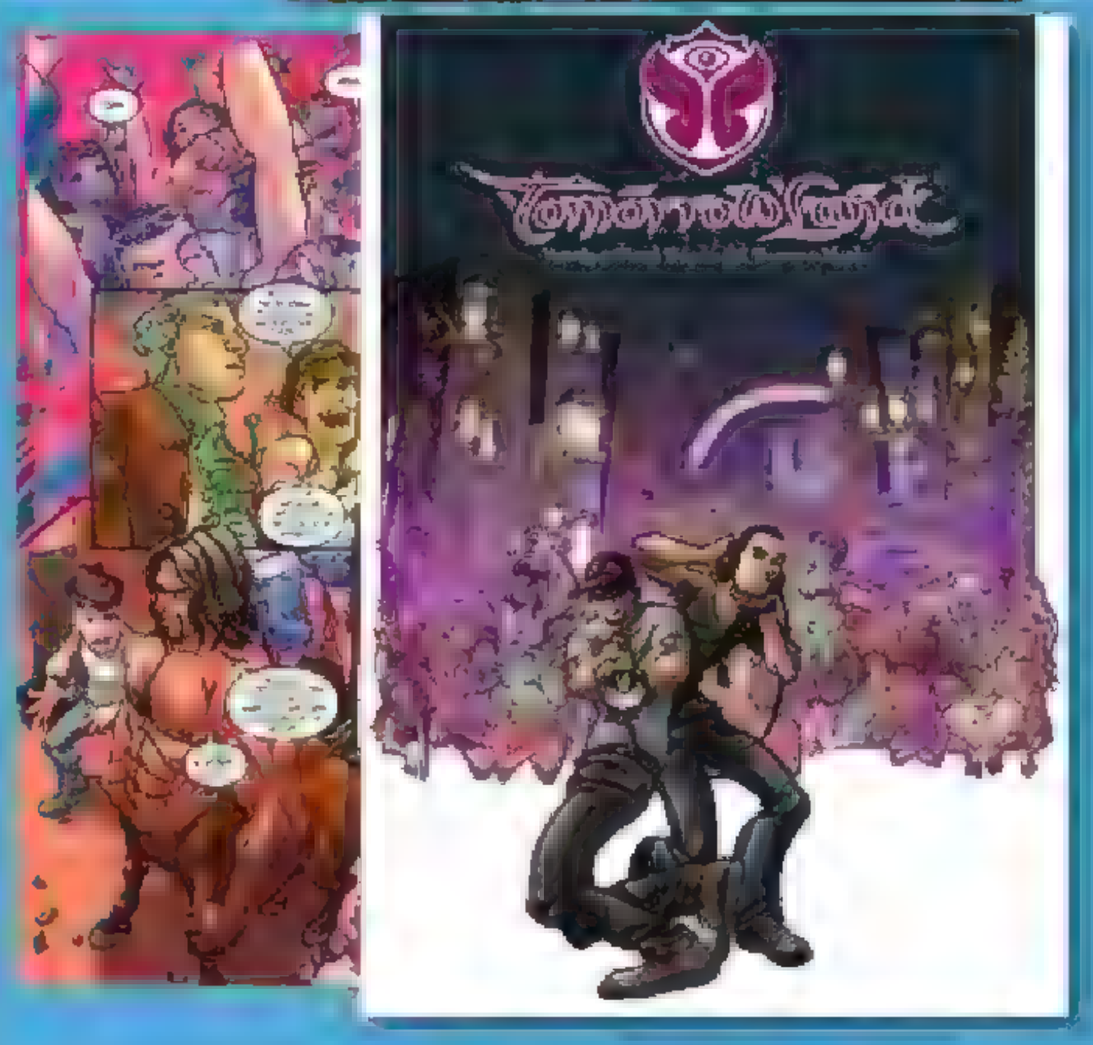
CH: And there's a new *Damnation Station* series coming soon...

AE: This is the one that wraps it all up, so hopefully the two halves should join together to make a complete story. It's about the war between galaxies that we set up in the first series, and how that plays out.

As for *Dredd*, I'm slowly putting together a story for the *Megazine* that should wrap up my current dangling plot threads with The Organisation, Deller, Ready Eddie etc. They don't fit so well in the post-Chaos world, so the story will be addressing that in depth. But it won't mean the end of my time on *Dredd* since – as long as Tharg will have me! – I'll want to write for the strip.

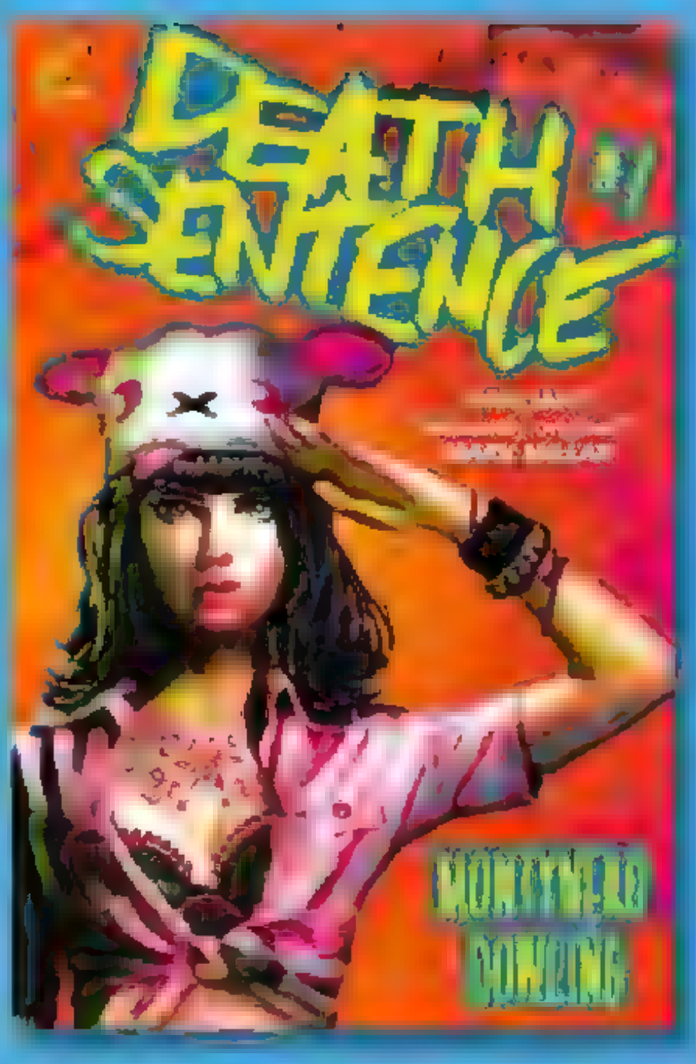
Mighty Avengers *and* ***Mars Attacks Judge Dredd*** *both hit stores in September.*

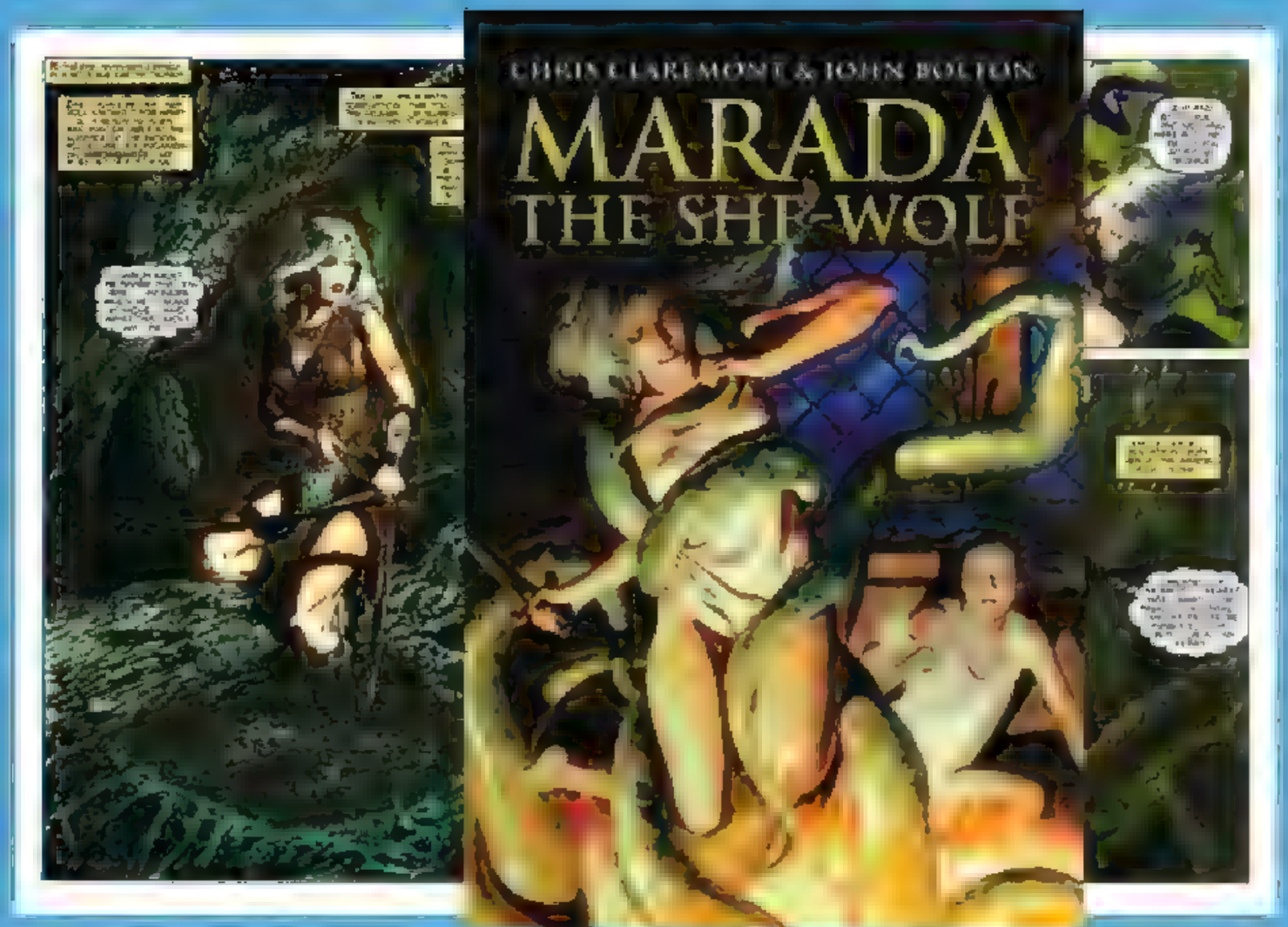


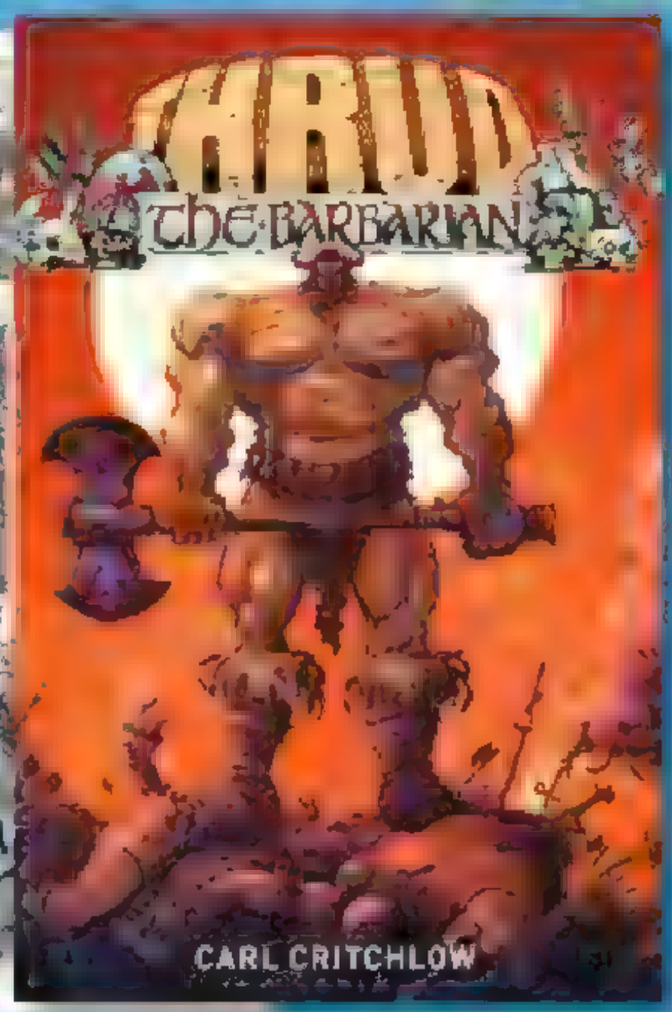


NEW UN

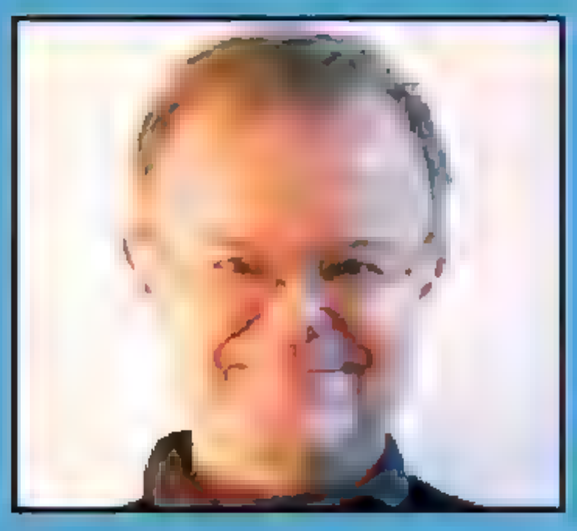
Rarely does an entire new comic book company emerge fully formed. And rarer yet that it's both British, and well-funded, well-organised and exhibiting every sign of being sensibly thought through. Yet that's exactly what seems to be happening with new Titan Comics, as boss Nick Landau explains to **Matt Bielby...**





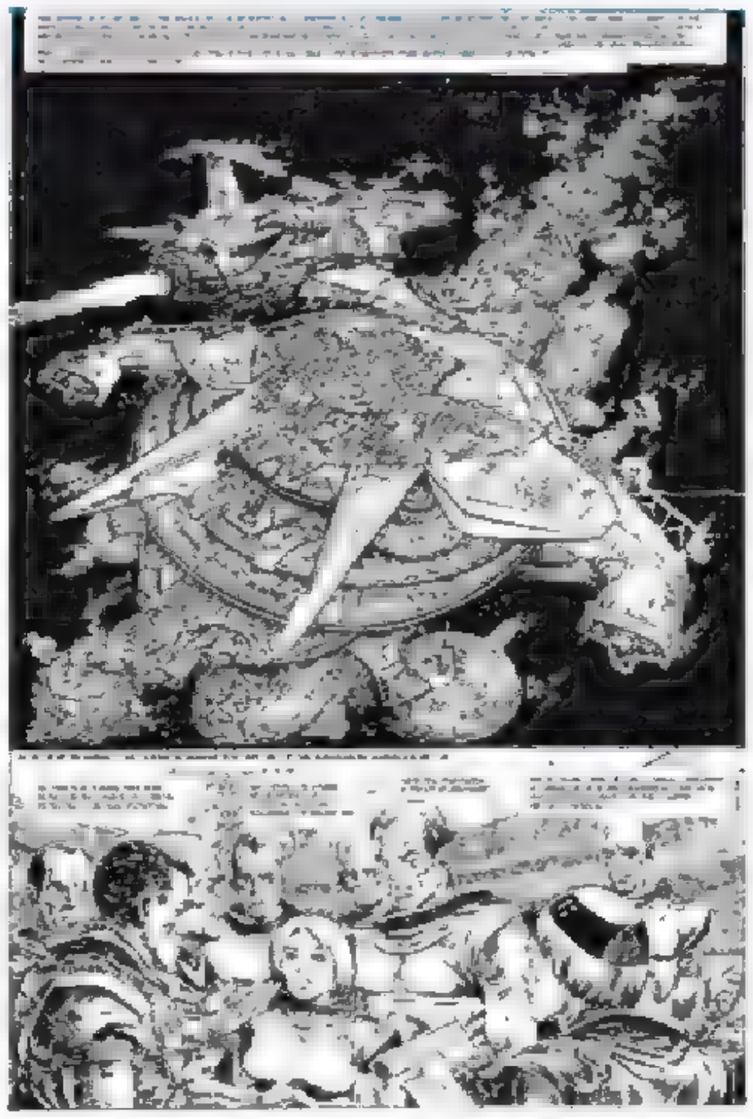


IVERSE



Titan Books is, of course, a famous name in the genre world. They publish art books (the definitive Chris Foss spaceship collection is a recent favourite) and fiction, mostly SF, horror and crime. They do books about rock stars and film directors, and cult TV shows too. And they have their sister companies: Titan Magazines and the Forbidden Planet stores, of course, but even, at one point, a distribution arm.

Graphic novel collections have always been part of what they do, however, be they collections of newspaper strips – *Hagar The Horrible*, anyone? – or UK specific versions of DC's entire trade paperback line. Yet the sweet-looking DC deal ended in the spring of last year, leaving »



something of a hole in their schedules, and now – a year or so later – we get Titan's response. Yes, it's a brand new comics company, producing graphic novels and monthly floppies both, reprinting choice (if often obscure) old material but creating brand new characters and storylines too.

It's exciting stuff, providing a great new venue for fresh creators and old warhorses alike, and exhibiting a slick professionalism rare in this business. Behind it all: Nick Landau, co-owner (with his wife, Vivian Cheung) of the Titan Entertainment Group, and one of the major figures in British comics over the past 40 years. Clearly, it was high time we caught up with him to find out what he has planned…

Above: Jack Katz's *The First Kingdom*, check part of t out for yourse f in this issue's *Giant-Size Sidekick* ..

Below: Titan's monthly *A1* anthology includes the very odd *Weirding Willows* and the clown bash ng *Carpe Diem*

Comic Heroes: Where did the idea come from and why now?

Nick Landau: The concept of Titan Comics has been percolating for many years. The comic book team here has a lot of experience in the industry, for one thing: our managing editor created comics at Marvel UK for a number of years, I was a Tharg on *2000 AD* for quite a while, including 'The Cursed Earth' years, and our sister retail chain, Forbidden Planet… Well, I guess you know who they are!

Why now? Because we're in the middle of a renaissance of comic book publishing. Look at all the top movies coming out, look at the reason why your magazine is being published – and comic book sales are, again, back on the increase.

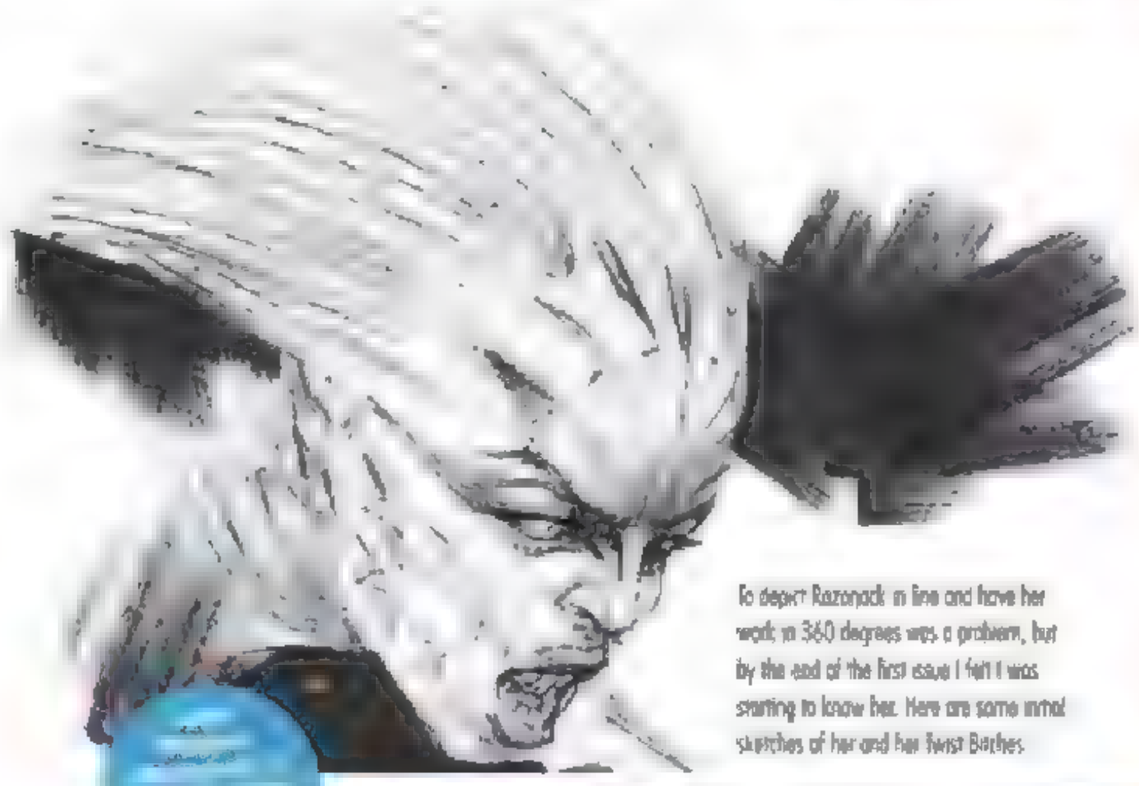
CH: So what do you want to achieve with the line? How will success or failure be defined, and what are the biggest opportunities and potential stumbling blocks you face?

NL: We all like comics, we've all been in the field for years, and – as a global publishing firm which is particularly strong in the US (a Titan title, Stephen King's *Joyland*, has been the #1 *New York Times* Bestseller for the last two weeks), but also big in the UK and the rest of the world – we have a uniquely broad distribution model for our titles

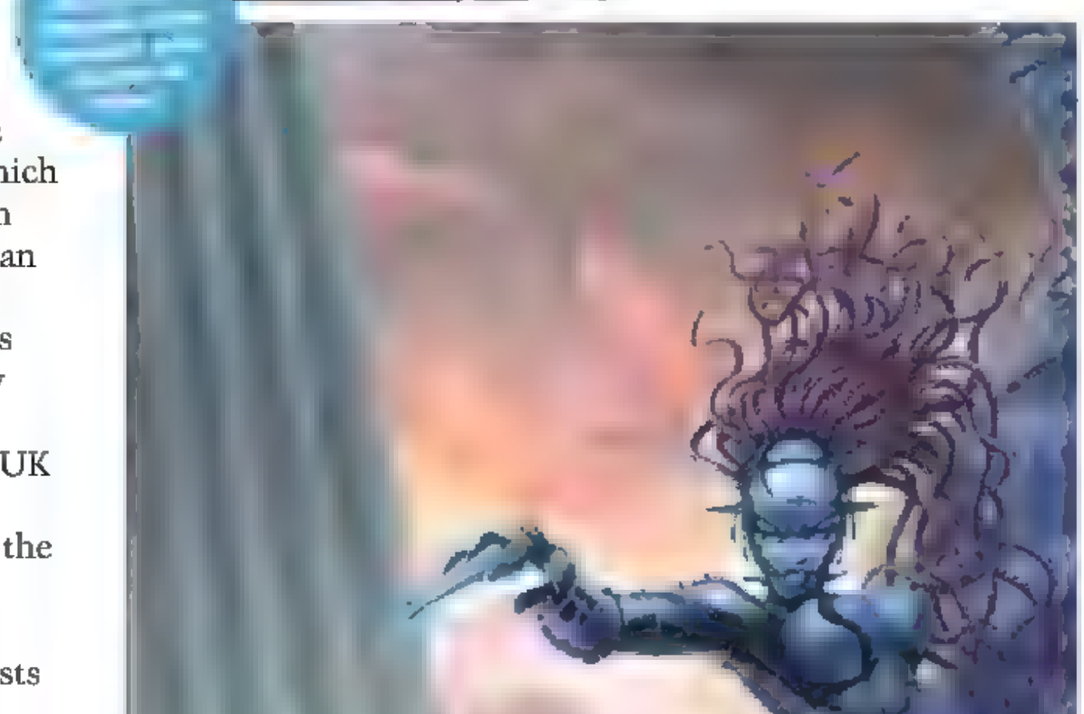
We want to publish the comics we love, whether they be creator-owned or

"We want to publish the comics we love, creator-owned or licensed"

To start to get a feel for the world I'm creating, I doodle around scenes for as long as the deadline allows. Sometimes an image will appear that I can use to add depth to Razorjack's world. The Twist Brothers were a design chore I could have happily endured all week.



To depict Razorjack in line and have her work in 360 degrees was a problem, but by the end of the first issue I felt I was starting to know her. Here are some initial sketches of her and her Twist Brothers.



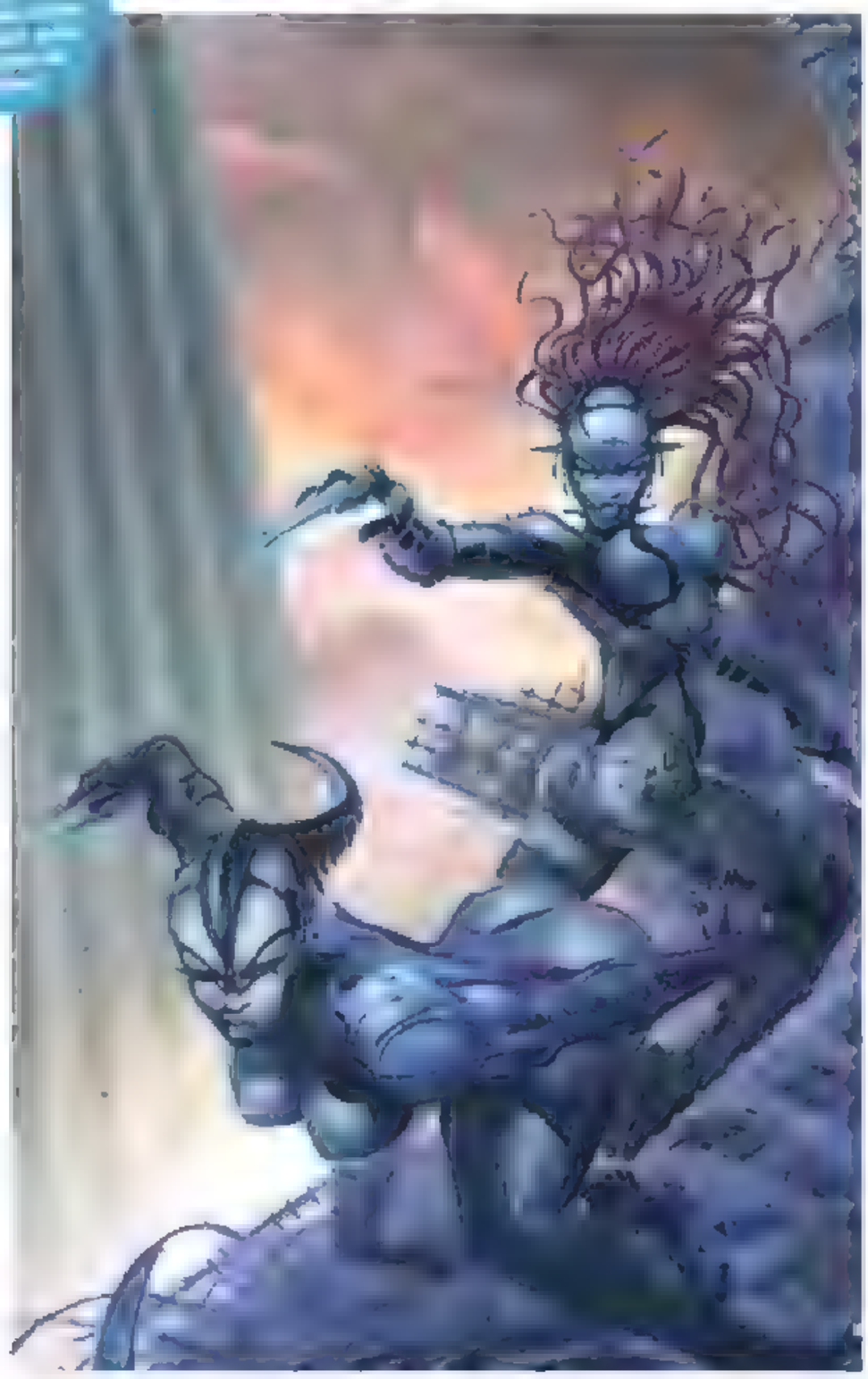
licensed – and are very excited about the opportunity we now have to bring the best UK creators to a world platform. We've had literally hundreds of projects submitted to us by wonderful UK writers and artists, most of whom would otherwise not have had an opportunity to be published. We've been one of the largest comic book publishers in the UK for years – and, with an ambition to match this in the US, we have plenty of capacity for new projects. In many ways, there are very few stumbling blocks. We've been publishing since 1981 so we already have all the editorial, marketing and sales platforms in place on a global basis. And we've certainly had time to iron out the kinks!

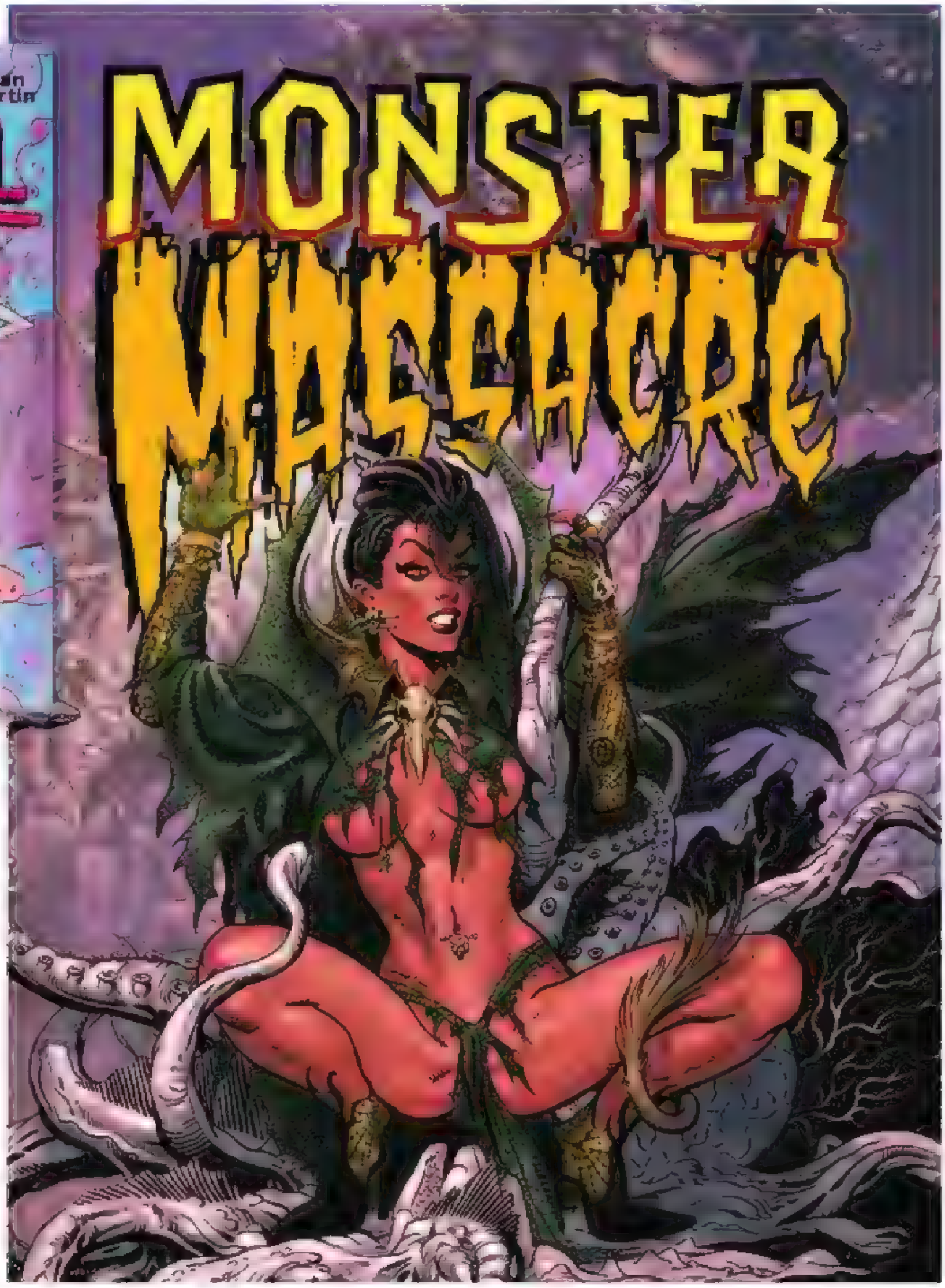
CH: How did you come up with your initial line-up of original comics and graphic novel collections, and what qualities do you think they share?

NL: The original line-up has been predominantly UK creators and projects. We strongly believe that some of the best comic creators in the world are British, which has been proven by people like Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Pat Mills, Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons, Grant Morrison, Mark Millar, Garth Ennis and Bryan Hitch, to name but a few – and that our responsibility is to represent the wonderfully talented UK creators on the world stage.

Our editorial team puts together the first wave of the UK creators and projects, working with a combination of writers and artists whom they already knew and admired, from portfolio reviews at conventions – Titan attends many – and direct submissions to our website from various creators.

Death Sentence and *Chronos Commandos* both came to us through the Kapow! Comic Convention, for instance, and were developed from there. On the other hand, *It Came!* and *Numbercruncher* were the first two titles to come out of our outreach to established creators. Then 2014 will see the release »





of *Surface Tension*, which is one of the first titles to make it through the blind submission phase.

We're constantly on the look-out for new talent and new creators, however, whether that's creators we know approaching us due to our increased profile, or previously unknown creators coming to our attention.

Do I have a personal favourite? Not really. It's very difficult to choose, as we're only publishing titles that we really love.

CH: Do you have a particular model for the sort of publishing house you want to be?

NL: Our model is to produce great comics – but our focus is on both creator-owned and licensed properties.

Our licensed title range will appeal mostly to fans of those licenses, so our aim is to produce comics which reflect the existing properties, but also to add unique stories which can only be told in the comics medium.

CH: Are any of the books what you'd consider 'tent-pole' titles, and what particular qualities do they have that makes them so important?

NL: Each of our creator-owned titles is a tent-pole in its own right – though that judgement call will ultimately be made by the readers. However, from a licensing perspective,

Above: *Monster Massacre* features stories from some of comics' greatest talents – including a reprint of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's *Black Cat Mystery* story 'The Greatest Horror Of Them All'

"We're very excited about bringing the best UK creators to a world stage"

the first tent-pole that we've announced is *Family Guy* – but you will see other major announcements in the autumn…

If you use the Hollywood analogy of tent-poles as being a major franchise that can generate mega-sales and a broad range of creative interpretations then yes, we have a number of those to announce…

CH: Beyond what's been announced, what sorts of projects can we expect to see from you in the future?

NL: We started as a mass market publisher who publishes books, comics and magazines in the bookstores, comic book shops and on the newsstands globally – and have often been surprised to find that a number of the household name comic book companies have far more limited editorial, marketing and distribution capabilities than we have.

As a comics company we're not under financial pressure to produce a set number of comics or graphic novels per month. Our determining factor is what we like creatively, and which licenses resonate with us, and that we feel will also do so with the readers.

The first Titan Comics are available now; for our thoughts on them, see 'Remember the Titans', and check out our reviews on page 92.

REMEMBER THE TITANS

Crazed accountants, sweaty superheroes and kangaroo testicles: the Titan line-up so far

It's an intriguing mix of new monthly ongoing comics and miniseries from creators familiar and less so, and graphic novel albums that range from the why-hasn't-that-been-collected before? to the strikingly unexpected. Here's the initial line-up, with commentary...

COMIC BOOKS

Lenore

Roman Dirge

Heavily tattooed LA-based ex-magician Roman Dirge initially created his Edgar Allan Poe-inspired black comedy strip *Lenore, the Cute Little Dead Girl* for a magazine in the early '90s, before she graduated into a Slave Labor comics book from 1998-2007; Titan is collecting those issues as graphic novels, and continuing the ongoing series. Expect more ghosts, good-deeds-gone-wrong, dead kittens and the secret origin of the sinister Taxidermy, Lenore's neighbour who looks like a rotting stag's head in a suit.

Solid State Tank Girl

Alan Martin & Warwick Johnson Cadwell

Tank Girl co-creator Alan Martin is joined by a new, suitably esoteric artist for a fresh miniseries; Booga, Jet Girl and the rest are back too, and this time the mission involves saving their favourite, small-scale electronics store - by undertaking a *Fantastic Voyage*-style journey inside Booga's nutsack!

Devil May Cry: The Chronicles of Vergil

Izu, Jean Bastide & others

Miniseries spin-off from the Capcom videogame, with brothers Dante - now trapped in a demon prison called Hellfire - and Vergil battling to save Earth from a potent demon infestation.

A1

Various

Dave Elliott's award-winning anthology returns in a new, full-colour incarnation the initial trio of strips are classic fiction mash-up *Weirding Willows*, the very superheroic *Odyssey* and assassin comedy *Carpe Diem*.

Numbercruncher

Si Spurrier & PJ Holden

Young love tries to cheat divine fate - in the form of the 'Divine Calculator of the Karmic Accountancy', and their surly bailiff agent, Bastard Zane - in a violent, time-twisting romance miniseries; it first appeared in black-and-white in the *Judge Dredd Megazine*, but will be expanded and recoloured here.

Chronos Commandos: Dawn Patrol

Stuart Jennett

Lush fully-painted art gives real punch to this miniseries tale of tough, time-travelling World War 2 soldiers battling dinosaurs and Nazis both.

It Came!

Dan Boultwood

To a post-war Britain, where everything stops for tea, comes a B-movie alien robot and the threat of invasion; can Dr Boy Brett and his assistant, Doris Night, find a way to stop it?

Tomorrowland

Paul Jenkins & Stellar Labs

From the writer of *Wolverine: Origin* comes a classic fight between the forces of creation and destruction, with two DJs nominated as 'Keepers of Creativity' and tasked with creating an event good enough to recharge the creative batteries of the entire universe.

Death Sentence

Monty Nero & Mike Dowling

The G+ Virus gives you superpowers; it also kills you. With six months to live, can three Londoners - sexy artist Verity, washed up rock star Weasel and famous comedian Monty - find a way to escape their fates?

GRAPHIC NOVEL COLLECTIONS

Adventure Time

Meredith Gran, Ryan North, Braden Lamb & others

This all-ages hit stars off-beat characters like Marceline the Vampire Queen, Peppermint Butler, Jake the Dog and Lumpy Space Princess. Based on the Cartoon Networks animated TV show.

Sharky!

Dave Elliott and Alex Horley

With bits of Zeus and Odin in his DNA, 16-year-old Sharky is transformed into a super-powered demigod when needs must; think the Hulk meets *Shazam!* but with an indie feel. Collects the four-issue miniseries.

Monster Massacre

Various

Everyone from Jack Kirby to Arthur Suydam crop up in this monster comic short story anthology.

Razorjack

John Higgins

The *Judge Dredd* and *Hellblazer* artist - and *Watchmen* colourist - is back with a collection of his Clive Barker-esque, creator-owned horror series, originally published by Com X.

Thrud the Barbarian

Carl Critchlow

The *Batman/Judge Dredd* and *Lobster Random* artist originally created Thrud for *White Dwarf Magazine*; he's a dopey, violent barbarian obsessed with beer, and his adventures are heaving with jokes at the expense of heroic fantasy. This collection brings together the five issues of his small press miniseries from a decade or so ago.

The First Kingdom

Jack Katz

Dense, detailed, heaving with lengthy captions and ambitious in the extreme American cartoonist Jack Katz's saga of the second rise of mankind has a bold epic sweep quite unlike any other comic. It's difficult to get into at first, but comprises one of the great comic book epics and stands amongst the medium's most spectacular personal achievements, a must-read series.

Wallace & Gromit The Complete Newspaper Strips Collection

Various

Collecting *The Sun*'s full-colour newspaper strips - the first album has 311 of them, comprising an entire year's run from May 2010 on - this shows how wide-ranging Titan is going in its search for exciting licensed material to publish alongside its assorted creator-owned heroes.

THE MIGHTY ATOM

Sandwiched somewhere between *Age Of Ultron* and *Infinity* comes a slightly smaller, X-men centric crossover.

By Stephen Jewell

Images © Marvel Comics

After Wolverine and Sue Storm's century-spanning escapades in *Age Of Ultron*, you'd have thought Brian Michael Bendis would have had his fill of time-twisting storylines. But no! Indeed, his next big gig – timed in neat synchronicity with the Merry Mutants' 50th anniversary – sees him joining fellow X-writers Jason Aaron and Brian Wood on *Battle Of The Atom*, a history-defining 10-week crossover that will see five future X-Men journeying back to the present day to confront the original quintet, a gang Bendis snatched from the '60s (or whenever early X-continuity is thought to take place these days) and brought to the here and now when he launched *All-New X-Men* last year.

"I was probably going to stay away from time travel stuff after *Age Of Ultron*, as I didn't want to suddenly become known as the time travel dude," he laughs. "But Jason Aaron pitched us a really cool story, and we all got excited about it – so it was a no-brainer to dive in and get to work."

After teaming up on an opening one-shot with Frank Cho, Bendis will share scripting duties with Aaron and Brian Wood as the tale continues in the pages of *All-New X-Men*, *Uncanny X-Men*, *Wolverine And The X-Men* and the adjective-less *X-Men* before climaxing with another special issue.

"You can expect major fallout in all the titles," teases Bendis. "When we get to the end of it, none of them are going to be the way they are right now. I know that's scary for some people, especially if you like a particular series, but this is an X-event with some teeth. Not all of the characters are going to be on the same teams or living in the same places. Some of them won't even *be* living – and there's a big shock at the end that will hopefully get people who aren't currently excited about the X-Men excited about the X-Men again."

Marvel senior editor Nick Lowe has described it as the mutants' equivalent of Valley Forge (a controversial military camp during the American Revolutionary War) and Bendis believes that the events of *Battle Of The Atom* are firmly rooted in the X-Men's intrinsic nature.

"The time travel stories that have the most impact for me aren't so much about the mechanics of how a character gets to and from different time periods, but more about what it reveals about them," Bendis reasons, citing *Back To The Future 2* – "the best one" – as a crucial touchstone. "What I liked about Jason's pitch is that it accentuated the part of *All-New X-Men* that I really like, and which a lot of people have been responding to very favourably. Ultimately the time travel stuff doesn't really matter; what matters is what happens to these characters when they're faced with a certain situation."

According to Bendis, Aaron's premise provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to really shake up the X-Men's very existence. "With all their different power-sets and things that they can do, there's always a feeling that anything can happen," he says. "They can control elements of time and space – and with that comes chaos. And how they shovel through that chaos is what's really interesting to me, and this story does that 10-fold. It's one of those storylines that you can only really do once, so you might as well just go crazy."

BATTLE ROYALE

First created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in what now look like the much simpler times of 1963, Bendis believes that the book's central subtext has barely altered in the past five decades – even if some of the X-Men have become increasingly colourful and outlandish.

"That's what's so interesting about it," he notes. "Leaving aside *All-New X-Men*, because that's about the original X-Men, it's the Marvel book and franchise that looks »

"You can expect major fallout in all the titles... this is an X-event with some teeth"

The tale continues in *All-New X-Men* #16.

the least like it's original premise of all of them – even though thematically it's still the same. It looks different and the characters feel different. It's, like, Magneto is now on the X-Men team – and you just can't imagine a *Fantastic Four* anniversary special, say, where it's well known that Doctor Doom is now one of the Fantastic Four."

MUTANT MISFITS

Conceived by Lee and Kirby as a parable about outsiders, the X-Men are still the favourite super-team for those of us who feel excluded from mainstream society.

"This book still represents an awful lot to a lot of people," Bendis says. "Whether it's people who have different sexual orientations, religions or skin colour, it talks to people; in X-Men, anybody can be a hero and fight for what they are and what they believe in. That message is the same, but the world has changed so much. That's not to say that there isn't racism or sexism anymore – clearly, there is – but we live in a world where intolerance isn't tolerated anywhere near as much. With that, the X-Men's fight gets more specific and personal – and, consequently, people's responses are then more personal."

He also pays tribute to Chris Claremont, who very much laid the seeds for the modern-day mutants when he first took the reins of *Uncanny X-Men* in 1975. "People forget that this idea that mutants represent racism or beauty, that's all down to Chris Claremont," says Bendis. "Back then, that was a revolutionary idea and it's since been co-opted by many, many things. But Chris really found something there and he took it to the extreme with *God Loves Man Kills*."

He's referring, of course, to the popular 1982 Brent Anderson-illustrated X-Men graphic novel, which introduced fanatical anti-mutant crusader William Stryker.

"Chris will always be as important to the X-Men as any creator has been important to anything. That's not to forget what Stan and Jack did, but he made them vital again. The length of Chris' tenure is also impressive, as he spent about 30 years guiding the X-Men through all the different ways that stories can be told. And look at the artists he worked with: John Byrne and then Paul Smith and John Romita Jr, right the way up to Jim Lee."

FUTURE PERFECT

Like next year's Bryan Singer-helmed big screen X-extravaganza, *Battle Of The Atom* references what must surely be Claremont and Byrne's most famous storyline (with the obvious exception of 'The Phoenix Saga'), 'Days Of Future Past'. With its startling cover proclamation that 'everybody dies,' the *Terminator*-style dystopian X-epic was physically short – it only ate up two issues, 1981's *Uncanny X-Men* #141 and #142 – but hugely influential. Curiously enough, it first saw print a full three years before James Cameron's Arnold Schwarzenegger-starring cyborg thriller made its celluloid debut.

"It was also Chris who established that this franchise could be anything it wanted to be, from month to month," says Bendis.

"It can be a monster horror movie or a vampire story, a love story or a baseball story. Whatever you throw at the X-Men, it fits – because there's so much to them. And the pinnacle of that was 'Days Of Future Past', so all of us are crossing our fingers, hoping that the film does it justice.

"But we don't just want to rip him off and do a carbon copy. Chris did so much with those characters, was so good at finding them unique voices, that you need to find different things to do with them while still feeling that it's them, which is a very hard thing to do. That's what we're trying to bring to *Battle Of The Atom*; we're desperate to avoid doing a cover band version."

Bendis felt similarly about the Man Without Fear, having penned Daredevil's monthly adventures from 2001 to 2006. "The instinct to do a cover band version of Frank

"This book still represents an awful lot to a lot of people... it talks to people"

"Whatever you throw at the X-Men, it fits – because there's so much more to them"

Miller is almost overwhelming, but you just can't do it," he recalls. Of course, Bendis recently teamed up with old pal David Mack, and *Daredevil* old hands Klaus Janson and Bill Sienkiewicz, on the *Dark Knight Returns*-esque final Matt Murdock tale, *End Of Days*.

"Klaus and Bill really are the real deal, so to work with them on that book was a total honour for David and myself. They both meant so much to both of us in our formative years that it's almost impossible to say it to them without sounding ridiculous. But we went through the whole process of making that project with everybody still liking each other, so we want to try and do it again. We have an idea for a sequel, but we'll have to see how the trade paperback does, as these are tough times for mid-list characters."

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Bendis is also currently collaborating with another legendary creator, Neil Gaiman, on *Guardians Of The Galaxy* as the *Sandman* author's one-time *Spawn* character, Angela, has joined forces with the space-faring superheroes.

Angela's arrival was originally intended to be a closely guarded secret, but was officially announced somewhat early after the leaking of some potential spoilers.

"It would have been brilliant if you didn't know what was going to happen, but it just wasn't meant to be," admits Bendis, who is working from a treatment developed by Marvel's chief creative officer, Joe Quesada.

"Joe's developed a bunch of ideas for Angela in the Marvel Universe that's so elaborate and cool that I just have to let it happen as it's supposed to in the books."

As he told *Comic Heroes* last issue, Gaiman is mostly making sure that Angela's dialogue sounds authentic, similar to the way he oversaw Death's appearance in the Paul Cornell-written *Action Comics* in 2010.

"He can do as much as he wants to, it's up to him," says Bendis of Gaiman, who is now credited as a consultant rather than co-writer.

"I hand him over everything that we're doing as we're doing it, and he can change it as he sees fit or scribble all over the damn thing if he likes.

"It's the same situation I had with Klaus and Bill on *End Of Days* – and Walt Simonson on *Avengers*, for that matter – as those guys were all formative figures in my training as a creative person. So if they have a suggestion for something they want to do, I'm like, 'Go ahead, as it's all stuff that I stole off you in 1987 anyway.'"

*The 10-part **Battle Of The Atom** crossover begins in September with **X-Men Battle Of The Atom** #1, and concludes with #2 the following month; two issues each of the four key X-Men titles, starting with **All-New X-Men** #16, are sandwiched in the middle.*

Legend of Hill's House

Joe Hill, acclaimed spook-novelist and comic book auteur, seems to have inherited both the beard and the storytelling chops from his celebrated father, Stephen King. Now his hit horror series *Locke & Key* is drawing to a close, but he's not walking away from comics – or the nastiness – just yet...

By Stephen Jewell

With his creepy, highly effective third novel *NOS4A2* – it's a car licence plate, one that will make much more sense if you say it out loud – tearing up the bestseller charts, and the Daniel Radcliffe-starring adaptation of his second opus, *Horns*, set to hit cinemas later this year, Joe Hill has now carved out for himself a formidable reputation as a master of bloodcurdling horror; one that will perhaps even, one day, start to rival that of his esteemed father.

Stephen King has always professed a love of comics – though he took more than four decades to personally pen his first comic book, teaming up with Scott Snyder on the first arc of Vertigo's *American Vampire* in 2010 – but the medium seems to matter even more to Hill. After all, his first bona fide sale as a writer of any type was an 11-pager for 2005's *Spider-Man Unlimited* #8.

"A lot of people think my first big professional breakthrough was with my debut novel, *Heart-Shaped Box*, but that's not true," Hill told *Comic Heroes* when we met him during a recent London visit. "But actually, before I was ever a novelist, I was a comic book writer. And yes, my first big breakthrough was writing *Spider-Man* for Marvel."

Not that his comic book career ended there, of course. Hill would later persuade the then rapidly growing independent IDW to take on his inaugural ongoing »

All images © their respective copyright holders

> **“I love the comic book form – I’m very comfortable with it”**

comic book series, *Locke & Key*, in 2008, off the back of his impressive 2005 short story collection *20th Century Ghosts*.

The *Locke & Key* story tells of a creepy old manor house in Massachusetts, and the family who move there after the gruesome murder of their father. Once ensconced the kids discover the place is full of magic keys, clever little pieces of metal that can do pretty much anything (open doors to anywhere, turn you from a boy into a girl or the other way around) while an ancient evil lurks largely off-screen, looking to use the keys to escape its ancient prison. Now, after six years and almost 40 issues, Hill and artist Gabriel Rodriguez are poised to bring the supernatural saga of the Locke family to a close with the devastating sixth volume, *Alpha And Omega*.

Not that this is the last we’ll see of Key House, or Hill and Rodriguez as a team, as the long-time collaborators have a host of new creative irons in the fire, ranging from prequel series *The Golden Age* to an unspecified DC project. And that’s not all, for the author is also working on *Wraith*, a comic book spin-off of *N0S4A2* for IDW.

Comic Heroes: We’d imagine wrapping up *Locke & Key* must have been a pretty emotional experience for you?
Joe Hill: Right now I don’t know how I’m going to feel about it long-term. But while it’s pretty much over for me, it’s not over for Gabriel Rodriguez who, at this point, still has to draw about 55 pages of story!

CH: Was it tricky bringing all the various convoluted story elements here to a satisfying conclusion?
JH: The great risk with a long-running series is that you’ll pile the mysteries on top of mysteries until there’s no hope of getting a set of satisfying conclusions.

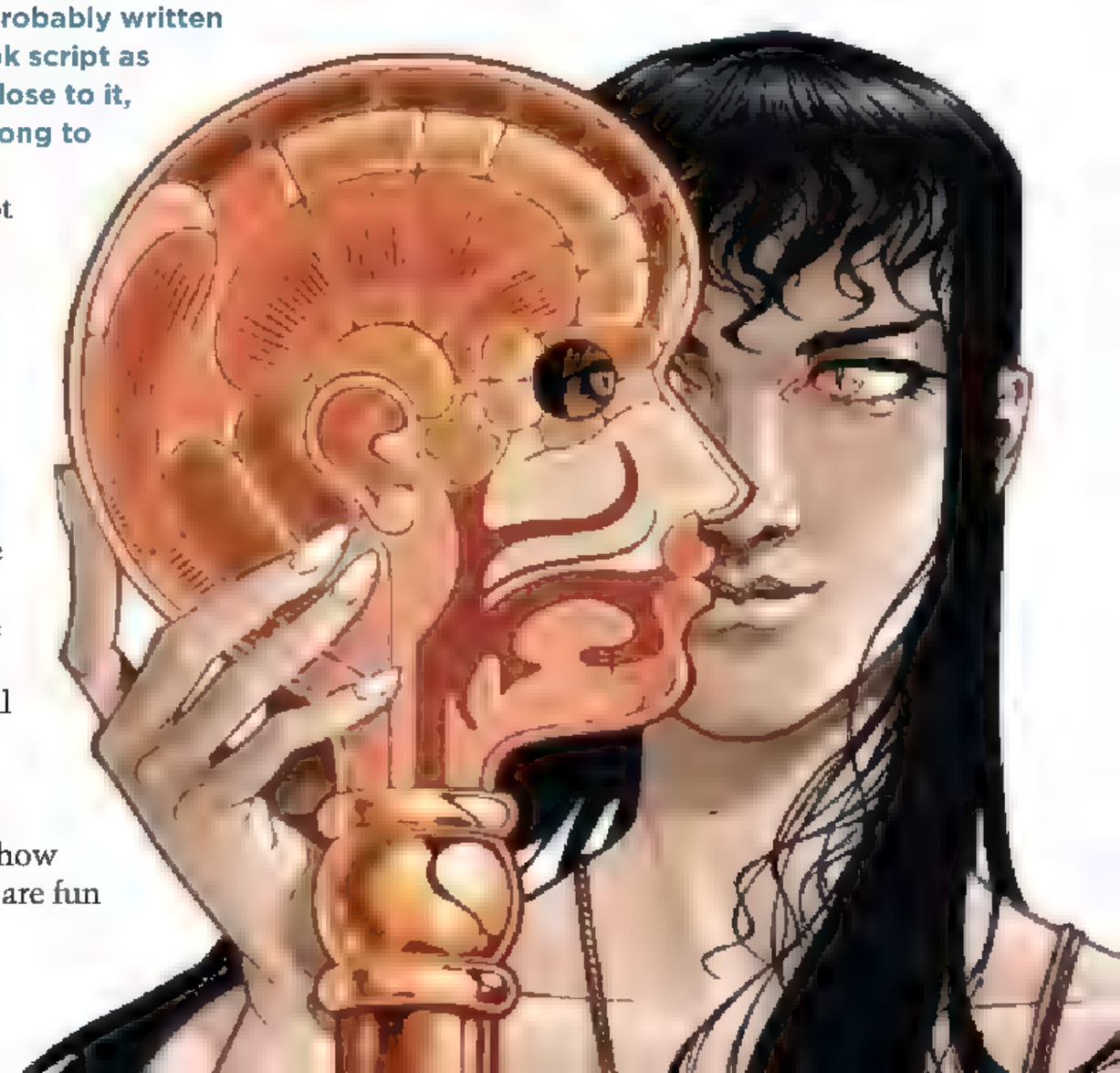
In the case of *Locke & Key*, Gabe and I have kept our mysteries fairly small. We didn’t ask any questions that we didn’t have answers for, and we tried to construct solutions for our puzzles that were fairly elegant and simple. Most of the big questions that we raised – like ‘Where did the keys come from?’, ‘Why does Dodge want the key to the Black Door, and what’s behind it?’ and ‘What happened in the ’80s that destroyed Rendell Locke’s life?’ – were answered in our fourth book, *Clockworks*, so now we’re left with room to tell our finale with *Alpha And Omega*.

We’ve already had our plot resolution, so what we need now is emotional resolution for these characters. To that end we have this final great battle underground. Lovecraft and every character has a chance to step up and be identified either as a hero, a coward or a clown. That’s what you hope for – that you’ll have a chance to shoot all the fireworks at the end and bring a nice, emotionally satisfying closure for all the key characters.

Key House: messing with people’s minds.

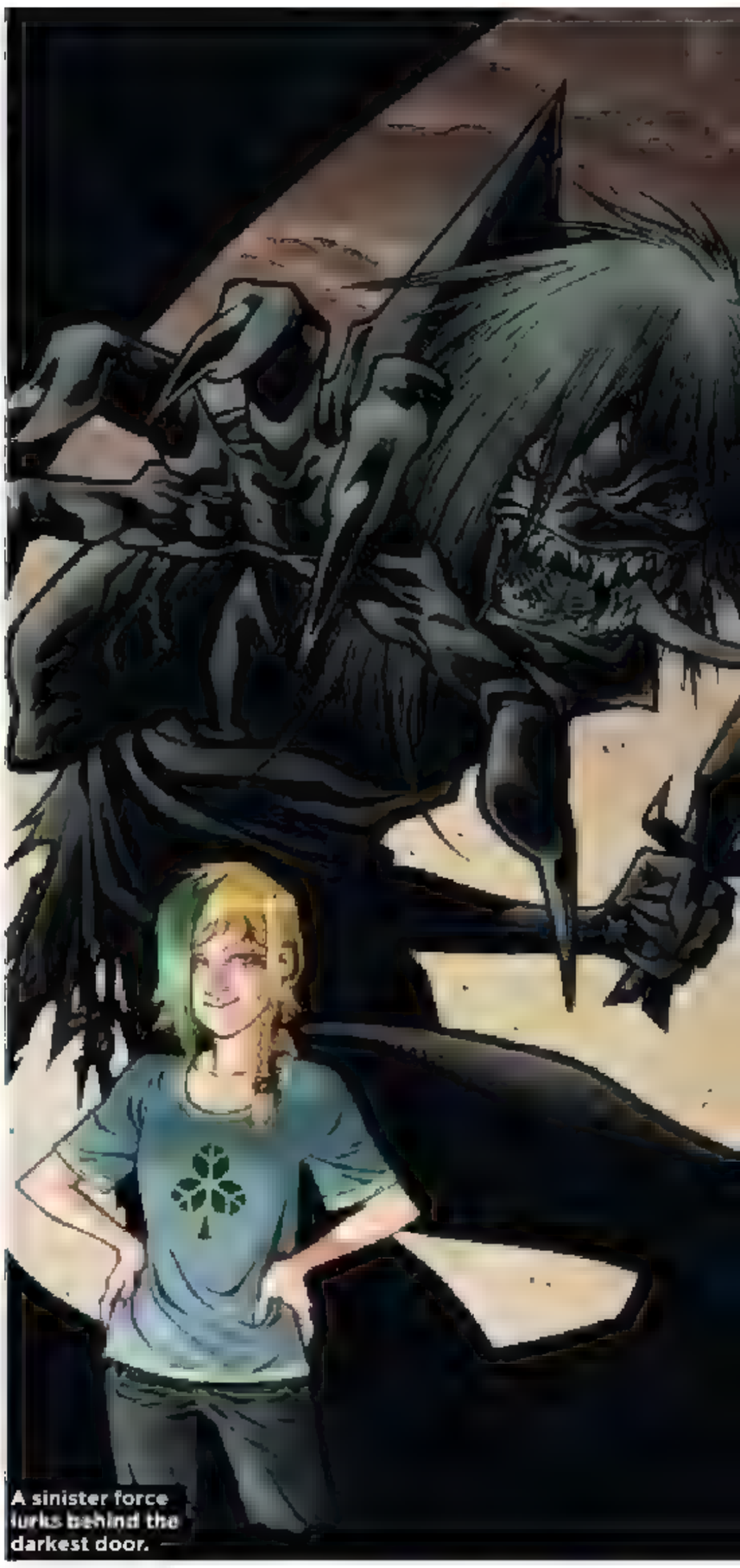
CH: In recent years, you’ve probably written as many pages of comic book script as you have prose fiction – or close to it, anyway. Does your heart belong to both mediums?
JH: Oh, I’ll always have a foot in both worlds. I have a fundamentally comic book imagination. I enjoy writing novels and short stories too, however, because those are different kinds of tests. A novel, in particular, is like a 15-round boxing match with the toughest opponent in the world. It’s a real brawl from beginning to end to get it the way you want it, and to do something that you hope will be a blast to read.

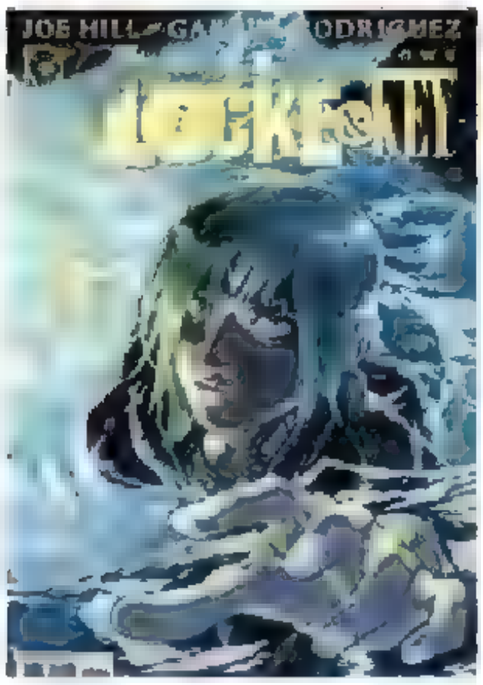
But I love the comic book form, and I feel strongly that there are things that I know how to do in that medium which are fun

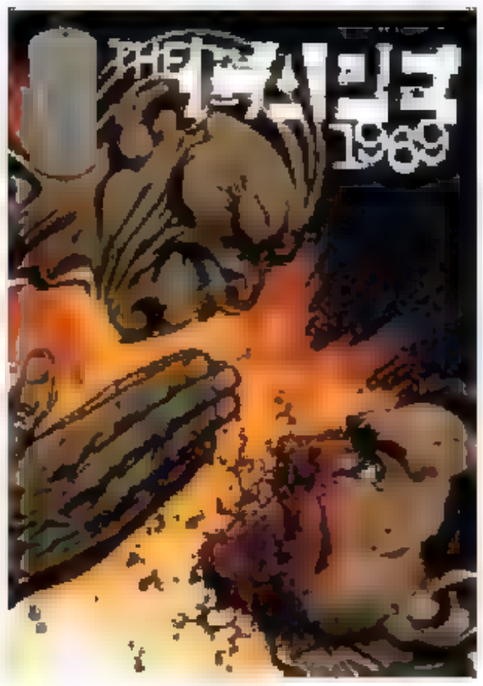


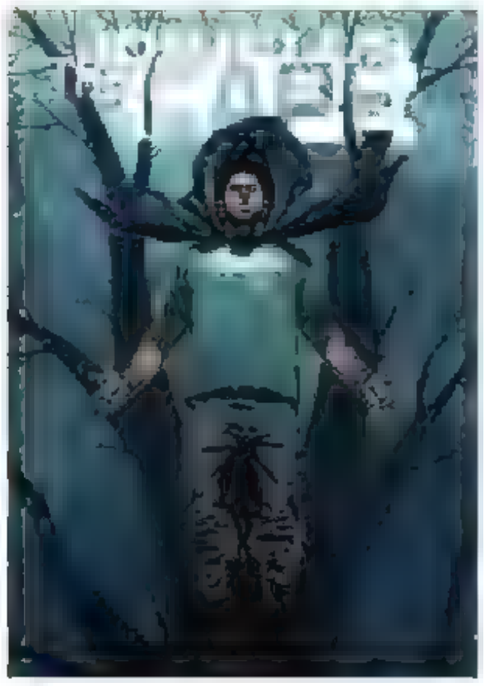
The key to unlocking another mystery?

THIS HOW IT WORKS, KID? THAT COWARD HAS YOU HANDLE HIS DIRTY WORK?
HE'S NOT A COWARD
YOU'RE NO IDIOT KID, I CAN TE... YOU'RE BETTER THAN THIS...
ENOUGH TALKING.
Exploring the dark side of power in *The Cape.*









and exciting. You can really plough a story along with them. I understand how to use the form well, I think, and I'm proud of that. I think a lot of novelists who come into the field don't know how to write a comic book story, but it's something that I'm very comfortable with.

CH: Do you think that there's much thematic crossover between your novels and your comics?

JH: I see shades of *Horns* in *Locke & Key* – particularly in the identification of the bad guy, Dodge, as being emotionally close to the hero, Tyler, and also to Tyler's father, Rendell. And I see similarities between *Locke & Key* and *N0S4A2* in the sense that both are interested in the perversion of innocence, and in children having their childhoods stolen away by some malevolent force.

But in some ways *Locke & Key* is one thing and *Horns* and *N0S4A2* are both another. There isn't much overlap between them all, as I've tried hard to keep each story distinct and unique without recycling material between one form and another. But I do have a tendency to write about some of the same ideas over and over again, such as that certain objects can help you release creativity – and that your creativity can make you powerful. That power can be used for good or ill, as creativity is a key that unlocks a door to a whole other world.

CH: Regret and redemption are also common subjects of yours...

JH: The idea that you've made mistakes and now you're going to try and atone is something that's in all the books. That goes back to the first issue of *Locke & Key*, where you have Tyler blaming himself for the death of his father. But it's like what Michael Chabon says about returning to familiar themes, which is that he doesn't know why he writes about the things that he keeps writing about, but he does know that he just can't help himself. I feel that way too, as there are certain things that I can't help but keep revisiting.

CH: Have comics influenced how you write books at all?

JH: A little. Comics are all about velocity, and there's a lot of focus on the reveal – which is the moment when you turn over an odd-numbered page to look at an even-numbered page. That's a great place to plant a full-page surprise or a big eye-popping shock.

I looked for a way to play that effect in prose, and what I came up with, in *N0S4A2*, is that throughout the book you're reading these chapters and you get to a place where there's a cliffhanger and it ends mid-sentence, which then flows through to the very next chapter – so the title of the following chapter will be the end of the sentence. And that kind of felt the same to me.

CH: *Locke & Key* started as a Marvel pitch. Would it have been very different if it had actually appeared through the House of Ideas?

JH: Marvel passed on it but if it *had* been a Marvel book, it would have still stood alone from the rest of the Marvel Universe and it wouldn't have necessarily tied into it at all. I'm not sure how it would have turned out though, because I don't know what they would have wanted me to do.

CH: You likely wouldn't have worked with Gabriel Rodriguez if *Locke & Key* had been a Marvel book, for one thing...

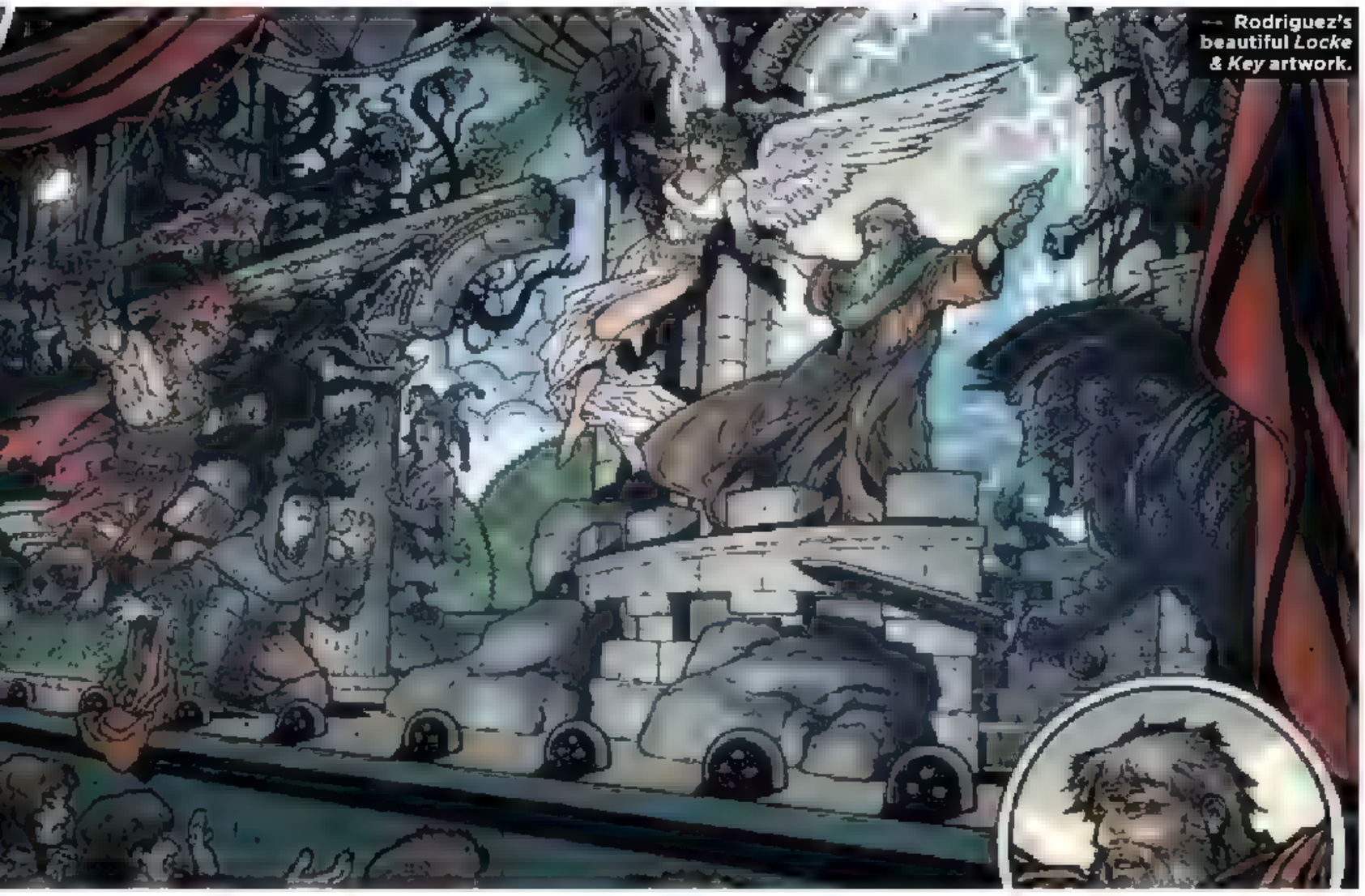
CH: It probably would have been a different artist, that's true, and that would have been a tremendous loss, as I don't think the comic would have ended up having anything near the same flavour or feeling.

I'm always careful to make sure that people understand that *Locke & Key* is not my story and Gabriel is just drawing it. It's very much *our* story, and we are telling it together. I've learned as much about those characters from the way Gabe draws them as he has ever learnt from anything I've written. We figured out the ending together too.

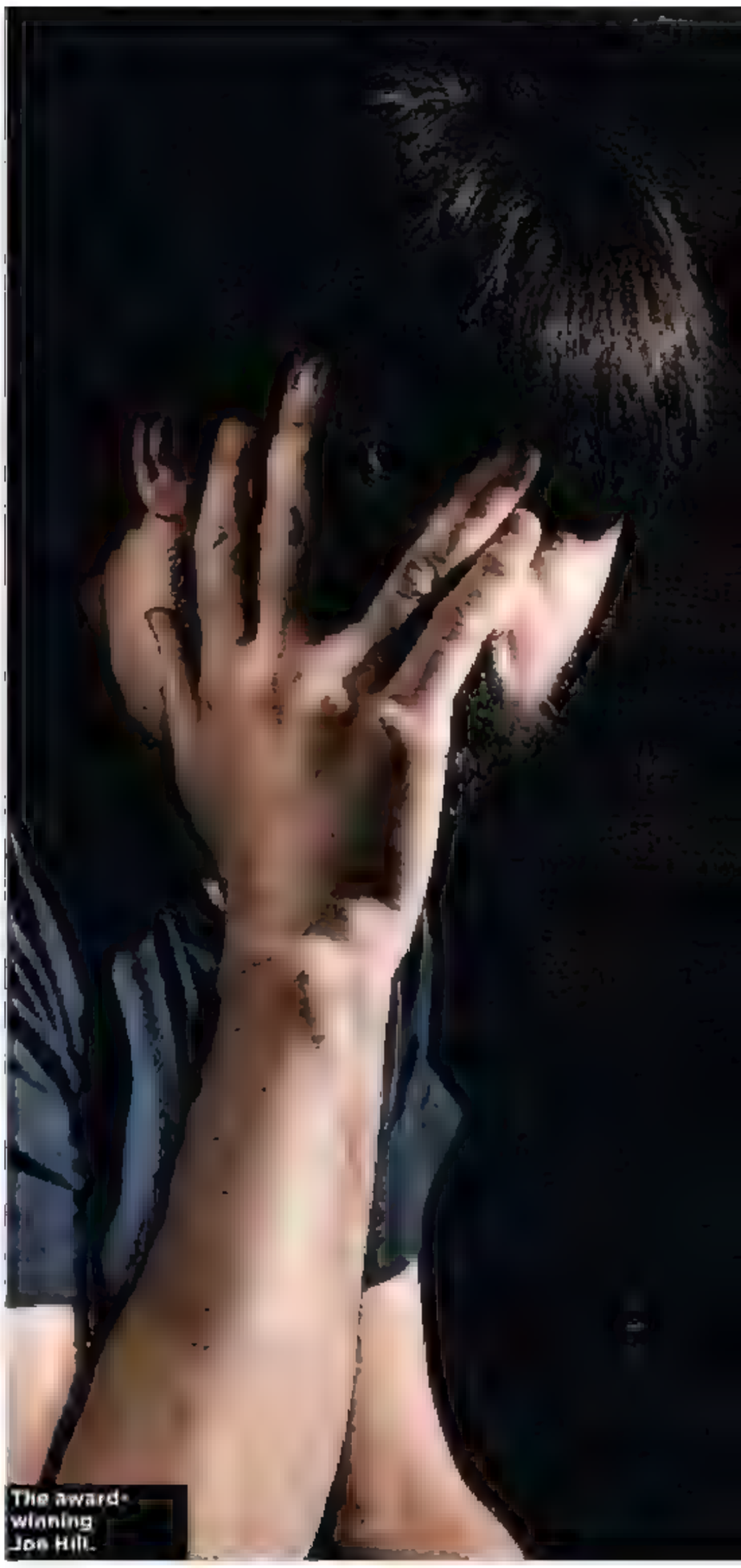
CH: But the story isn't completely over, as you're planning to delve into the *Locke & Key* universe further in *The Golden Age*...

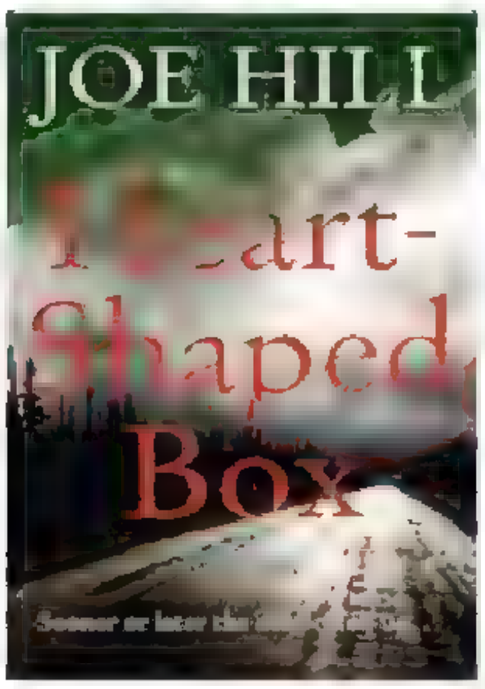
JH: There're certainly going to be some one-shots, which make up the seventh »

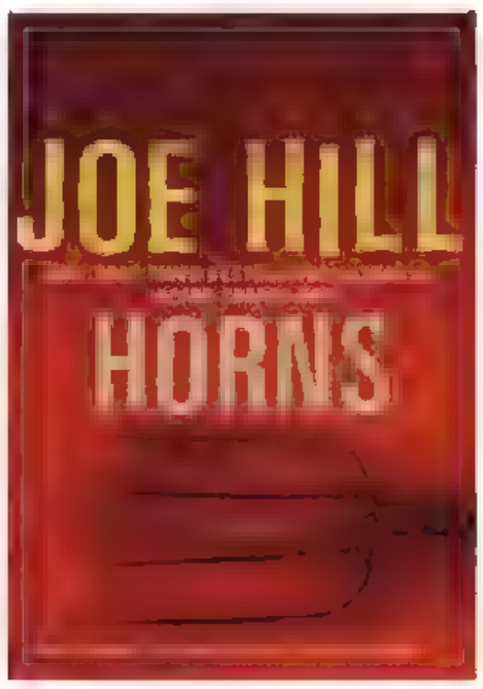
DL
-98-

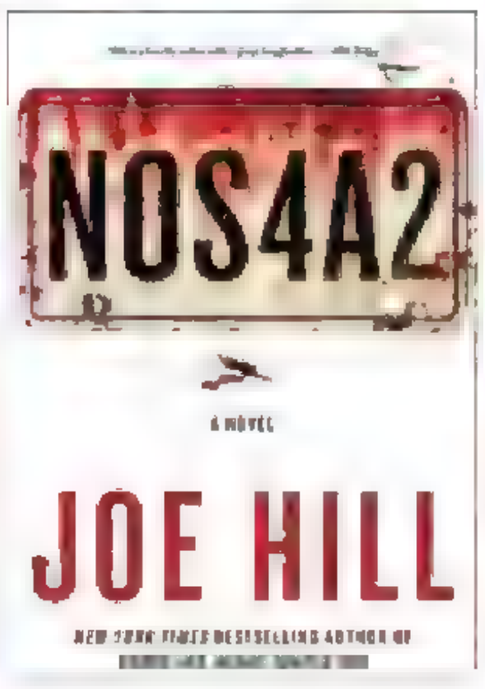


— Rodriguez's beautiful *Locke & Key* artwork.









book and will tell some stories from a happier time at Key House. We'll largely centre on the period from the turn of the 20th century right into the late '30s. We've already done two of those stories, 'Over The Moon' and 'Grindhouse', and there're going to be some more.

Gabe and I also have some other projects that we'd like to do, including a licensed character we're going to work on for a couple of issues after we finish some other stuff. We also have another creator-owned series we'd like to do.

But we don't intend to abandon *Locke & Key*, and at some point in a few years from now we'll get back together and do *Locke & Key: Battleground*, which will be a seven-issue story set in World War 2. That will explain some other things about the house, which has 250 years' worth of history, so there are lots of stories we can tell.

CH: You and Gabe are also working on a standalone superhero series for DC...

JH: The interesting thing about that is that the gig started out as one thing a couple of years ago, and now it's become totally something else. In some ways I'm more excited about the shift, as I've now got a really good story that I'm looking forward to telling.

The other things are that I'm a novelist as well as a comic book writer, and I can only focus on one project at a time – and that it takes Gabe 30 days to draw a 30-page issue.

There are some comic writers who can carry four comic books a month, but I'm not that guy. I can manage a novel and a comic at any one time, and that's about it. Until recently we've been working on *Locke & Key* so there hasn't been time to get started on something else, but now that's done there will be.

CH: Apart from *Locke & Key*, IDW has also published the Jason Ciaramella comic book version of your short story, 'The Cape', and an original prequel, *The Cape: 1969*.

JH: *The Cape* started out with a close adaptation of a story from my anthology, *20th Century Ghosts*, and then Jason and the artist Zach Howard launched into their own story. I was the creative consultant on that, and I helped Jason frame the plot and edited the issues.

The Cape: 1969 is even more Jason's baby. Basically I had a couple of ideas for what sort of story they could tell, as it's not specifically explained in the first book why the Cape enables the main character Eric to fly. We worked out this story that was kind of like *The Deer Hunter*, but if Christopher Walken's character could fly.

Beyond that, Jason is currently doing *Thumbprint*, which is a weird war story that's based on another of my short stories.

CH: Apart from your brief Spider-Man effort, 'The Cape' is the closest you've come to doing superheroes. Do you think you can say more about that particular genre in novels and short stories than you can in comics?

JH: At this point, it's probably more interesting for me to explore superheroes in prose fiction. I've always been a big comics reader, and I've always had a big comics imagination, but, even going back to childhood, I was not a big superhero guy.

My favourite comics were *Sandman* and *Swamp Thing*, and my dad had these huge hardcover collections of the EC horror comics. I loved those and read them with great fascination. I also read *Judge Dredd* comics when I was at high school, and I love *2000 AD*. I don't want to say that I didn't like any superhero comics, but the ones I remember liking were Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: Year One*. They seemed to be not like any other superhero comics to me.

***Locke & Key** is currently being developed as a film by Universal.*

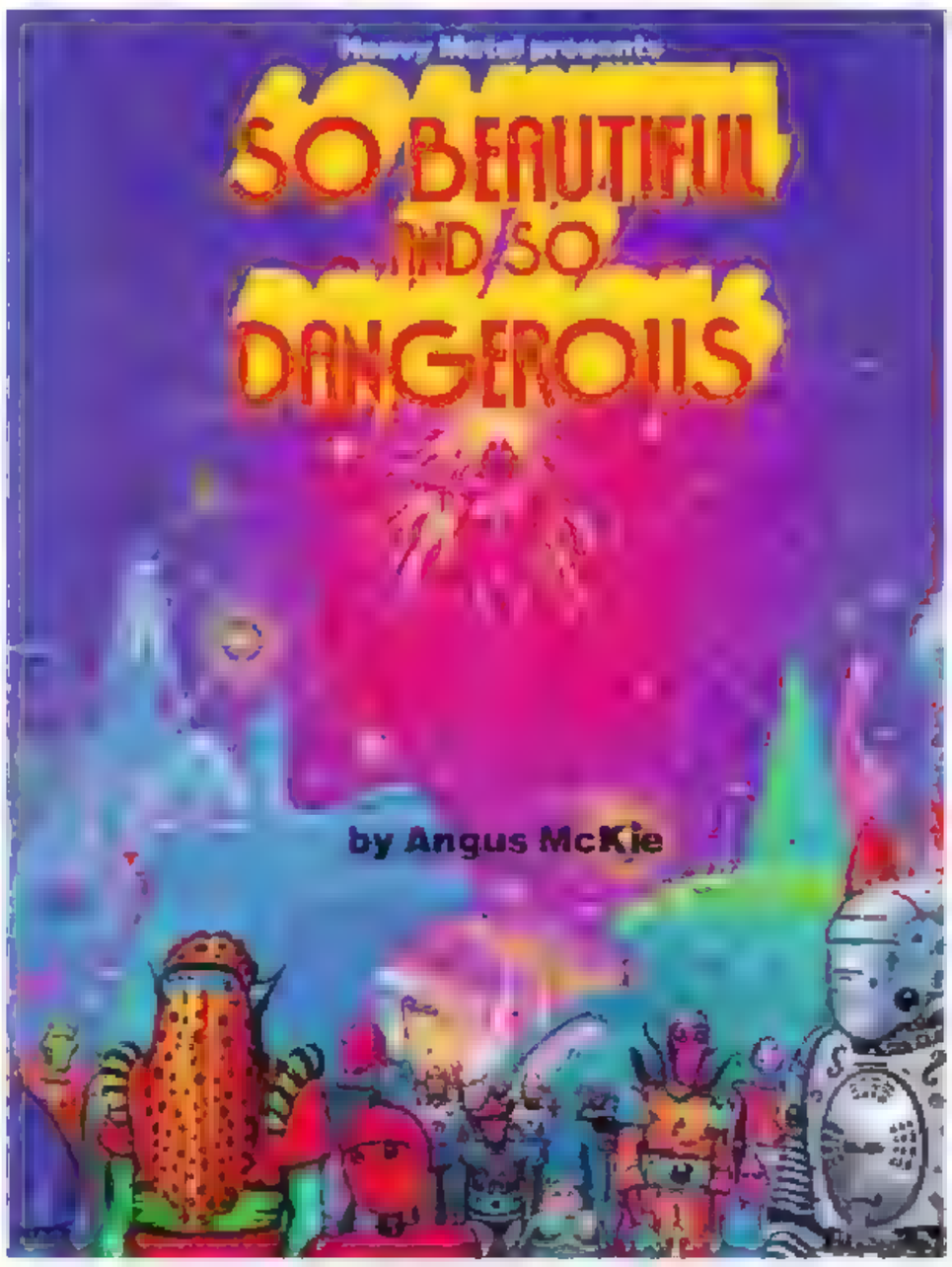
HELL IS OTHER ALIENS

Sometimes a great comic book creator appears in a flash of light, wows everyone momentarily, then disappears, hardly to be seen again. So it was with Angus McKie. **By Matt Bielby**

As with music or fashion, comics can sometimes seem gloriously of their era, and few more so than the stuff that appeared in the early years of *Heavy Metal* magazine.

One of the first lengthy original pieces commissioned was *So Beautiful And So Dangerous* – a late '70s fully-painted graphic novel by celebrated Scottish sci-fi paperback cover artist Angus McKie, heaving with neon colours, goofy aliens, occasionally nifty storytelling and – you'd expect little else – striking spaceship design. (Oh, and boobs – this was *Heavy Metal*, after all.) There's a richly plastic feel to the thing's visual aesthetic, and a Euro-camp to its sexual politics – and I mean both in the best possible way.

Below: McK e's masterpiece, hunt down a copy on eBay and discover why it's a cult class c



So Beautiful... originally ran in *Heavy Metal*, the American version of *Metal Hurlant*, which had begun in 1977 simply reprinting the European strips before branching out to include original English language material. This is where most of us first saw Richard Corben's *Den*, as well as early work by Walt Simonson (a great adaptation of the movie *Alien* in 1979) and Howard Chaykin (notably, an ambitious version of Alfred Bester's classic SF novel *The Stars My Destination*).

Angus McKie, too, had an SF book background – but strictly as a cover artist, his detailed, brightly coloured spaceships rivalling those of Chris Foss and Peter Elson on jackets for the likes of EE 'Doc' Smith, Brian Stableford and Philip José Farmer. Keen to stretch himself, McKie had his agent send samples of this stuff to the guys at *Heavy Metal*, promising a brand new comic strip with all the art in this style.

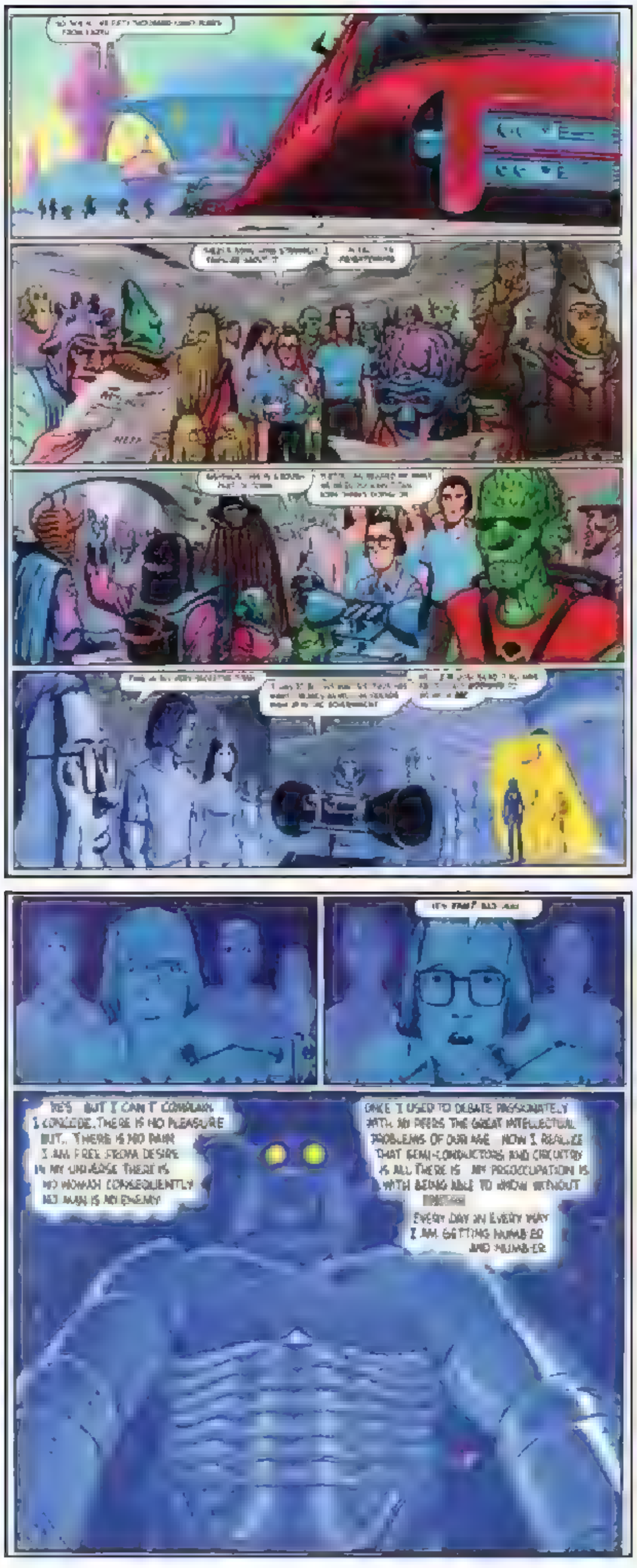
"We said yes, please, where do we sign, and assumed that the draftsmanship, colours, details, and designs would make up for what would doubtless be a typical, dim-witted space opera," explained *Heavy Metal* editor Sean Kelly shortly afterwards.

"Episode one arrived from England, on schedule. That in itself meant we were dealing with someone unique. We opened it up and looked it over. Sure enough, this loony English [sic] dude had drawn a comic, giving as much attention to each panel as your above-average illustrator gives to a full-page splash panel. Fantastic. And then we read it..."

Suffice to say, the *Heavy Metal* crew were impressed. *So Beautiful...* contains some imagery familiar from McKie's book covers – giant flying cities, vast spacestations in purples and greens, mile-long spaceships curving away from us – but is peppered with other references too. There's the Death Star trench, a post-coital Barbarella with her robot lover, the paintings of Edward Hopper, and music galore: the Stones, Dylan, Bing Crosby.

ALL RAYS LEAD TO AXIS

That *So Beautiful...* begins with a vast alien spaceship descending on America and scooping up whoever wants to join them – "Earth's rejects, the deadbeats, dropouts, drug addicts, pimps and prostitutes," we're told – so clearly references the last scenes of *Close Encounters* is no accident, and nor – we suspect – is the following picaresque journey's resemblance to *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* (first


AND THIS IDIOT BLEW IT!
WAP!
BOP!
YOU'RE WELCOME TO REST HERE FOR THE NIGHT CIRCLE AND TRAVEL WITH US. WE'RE HEADING FOR AXIS
AXIS? OH IT'S THE CAPITAL OF THE GALAXY. ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO LOTS OF CONCEITED PLANETARY GOVERNMENTS AT THE HUB OF THE GALAXY ALL WANTED THEIR WORLDS TO BE THE HOME OF THE GALACTIC COUNCIL. NATURALLY, NOBODY WOULD CONSENT TO ANY OTHER BUT THEIR OWN PLANET
SO THEY HAD TO BUILD ONE
HELP!
IT'S THAT BIG ASS
IT'S BUT I CAN'T COMPLAIN I CONCEDE. THERE IS NO PLEASURE BUT... THERE IS NO PAIN I AM FREE FROM DESIRE IN MY UNIVERSE THERE IS NO WOMAN CONSEQUENTLY NO MAN IS NO ENEMY
ONCE I USED TO DEBATE PASSIONATELY WITH MY PEERS THE GREAT INTELLECTUAL PROBLEMS OF OUR AGE. NOW I REALIZE THAT SEMI-CONDUCTORS AND CIRCUITRY IS ALL THERE IS. MY PREOCCUPATION IS WITH BEING ABLE TO KNOW WITHOUT
EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY I AM GETTING NUMB ED AND NUMB ER
HA HA HA!
PLEASE REMAIN SEATED YOUR
WE BRING YOU STRANGE NEWS

broadcast on Radio 4 in early 1978). Except Arthur Dent never palled up with a giant terrorist holding the galactic rulers to account with a massive stink bomb, and Trillian avoided sleeping with pint-sized droids.

Indeed, *So Beautiful...* is more sexualised than anything Douglas Adams ever wrote – the 'Sirens of Titan' are giant naked women on a space rock, and the entrance to paradise is revealed to "lie between a woman's legs" – but our everyman heroes, hunky counterculture type Steve (think: Peter Fonda) and gloomy, wisecracking Willy (the spit of Woody Allen), are bounced from weird alien to oddball space society to bizarre revelations about how the universe is run very much like Arthur, Ford and co.

Above: Smiley-faced spaceships, green scaly skinned aliens and boobs! All in glorious technicolour

So Beautiful... was collected by *Heavy Metal*/Simon & Schuster in 1979 – battered copies of this graphic novel are the version most people have read – and formed the basis for a sequence in the 1981 animated film *Heavy Metal*: it's different, but the memorable moments are here, including the giant, smiley-face spaceship that first visits Earth, its horny little jug-eared robot pilot, and the general waft of top quality weed that pervades.

Though it has its flaws – the plot bounces along but doesn't exhibit much sense or structure; the focus shifts between characters so often that it's hard to know who we're really meant to root for – *So Beautiful...* is a major achievement, and that McKie never completed anything else comparable (some short stories, some abandoned projects, the Photoshopped art of a 1998 graphic novel, *The Dome*, written by Dave Gibbons) seems a minor tragedy.

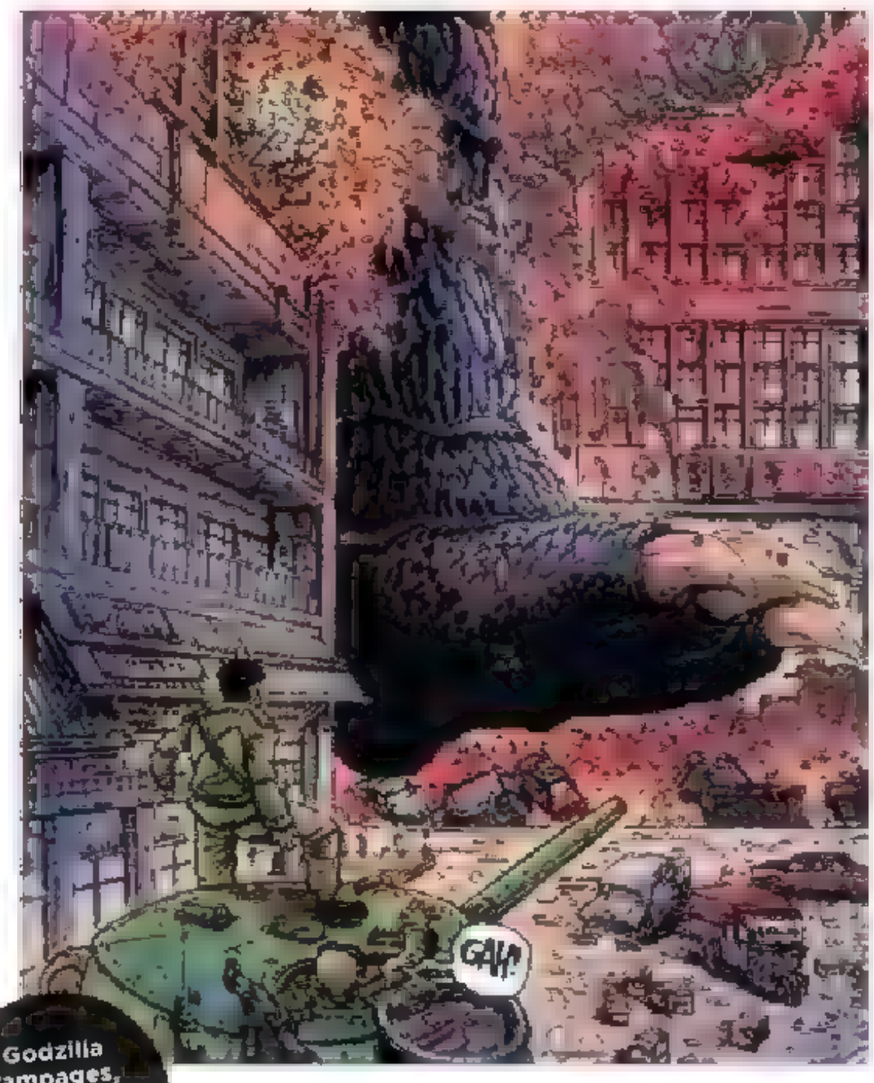
Most comic readers know him now as a respected colourist – he did Bryan Talbot's *Heart Of Empire* and most of the Frank Miller/Dave Gibbons *Martha Washington* stories – but *So Beautiful...* takes us back to a time when McKie was being bracketed with Moebius, Corben and Philippe Druillet, and Sean Kelly could say "he seems to be the most intelligent – or, at least, the cleverest – of them all."

So Beautiful... *ran in the 1978-79 issues of Heavy Metal; find it there, or in the 1979 graphic novel collection, a regular on eBay and car boot sales.*

KING OF THE MONSTERS

Godzilla, that goofy, magnificent Japanese man-in-a-suit monster, has had numerous Western incarnations, but one of the most effective has been in the comics of writer/artist James Stokoe. **By Michael Molcher**

Art images © IDW, James Stokoe, Oni Press



Godzilla rampages, wreaking havoc wherever he treads.

Scratchy inks and a blaze of red, gold and purple: Stokoe's art is eye-wateringly gorgeous.

Most Westerners see Godzilla as the campy giant superhero monster from the '60s

The incredibly detailed and expressive art style of James Stokoe first turned heads a couple of years back, with the arrival of his insane, violent and often hilarious creator-owned Image Comics fantasy series, *Orc Stain*. The result of his musings on whether all JRR Tolkien's orcs could have been as venal and single-minded as those depicted in *The Lord Of The Rings*, it announced the arrival of a major new talent.

Wonton Soup, the misadventures of a space-chef, followed and also earned a cult following, but it was with his work on *Godzilla* – principally as artist/writer of the incredible *Godzilla: Half Century War* series, now collected by IDW – that he became a darling of the mainstream too. It was high time, we thought, to talk to him about giant lizards, bad eating habits, and the joy of punching things.

Let's start with the big green chap: when did you first become a huge fan of Godzilla?

I've been into Godzilla for as long as I can remember. The '60s *Godzilla Vs Mothra* is one of the first movies that I can remember watching. Something about Godzilla has been stuck in my head forever, so I guess I'm a lifer. My Godzilla book is basically a rough run-through of all the different eras of Godzilla's history. The story starts off in 1954, using the first Godzilla film as a launching point, and each issue happens roughly 10 years later. It deviates quite a bit from whatever loose canon there is in the films, but I think it still touches on the spirit of the eras.

Do you think you always need that human element to give a sense of scale to Godzilla? Or is what matters about him just that he's a big lizard knocking things over?

I think it's possible to mingle in a bit of both. You definitely need the human

Stokoe's fantasy bash-'em-up *Orc Stain*.

Intergalactic cook-offs in Stokoe's *Wonton Soup*.

LIKE BACK IN TOKYO, I LEARNED THE HARD WAY THAT GODZILLA COULD NEVER BE STOPPED BUT YOU COULD GRAB HIS ATTENTION IF YOU ANNOYED HIM ENOUGH.
BUT THIS TIME HE WASN'T GOING FOR IT.
HE SEEMED TO MOVE WITH A PURPOSE AND RESOLVE THAT I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
SOMETHING DROVE HIM FORWARD AND NO AMOUNT OF FIREPOWER WOULD DRAW HIS ATTENTION AWAY.

Ota's obsession with the scaly brute spans five decades.

element because Godzilla films use him as a metaphor for human fear, so to not have actual people in the story probably isn't the best way to go.

There's also no reason why you can't have a big monster vs monster action scene, because that's a rather large part of Godzilla's charm too. I guess it's less about separating the two, and more about making sure that the action and the human drama mesh well.

What's been the reaction from Godzilla fans? Have you found the decades of material difficult to accommodate?

As far as I know, the fan reaction has been great. I haven't received any angry 'you destroyed everything I've loved' emails, so I'd wager it's going all right.

The amount of material really wasn't as daunting as I thought it would be. Each issue is almost its own separate story, so it's been easy to slip between the different spirits of the Godzilla films and not have it feel too disjointed.

I eat like a spoiled 12-year-old and the only exercise I do is when I go outside for a fag

Did you have any steer from IDW – or film company Toho, which owns the franchise?

Toho definitely has some say in how you portray him, but I haven't ever had a huge problem because it seems to be in line with how I look at Godzilla. They always gave me good notes and the reference to back it up with, so they've been great. IDW's been really, really good to work with too. I even ganked my editor, Bobby Curnow, to help me on *Orc Stain* in his spare time.

Why is Godzilla still so popular?

It's a good, simple idea that has adapted to the times. People have always been morbidly drawn to disasters, and Godzilla is a really cool-looking disaster. A lot of the earliest *Godzilla* comics were drenched in novelty, and I'm not too sure why that is. I understand that most people, especially Westerners, see Godzilla as the campy giant superhero monster from the '60s. But the newer books seem more in line with the very different way that I've experienced Godzilla growing up, and *Half Century War* has been a good fit with IDW's regular Godzilla line. I don't want to say that they're super-serious comics, because they've still got that healthy dose of camp thrown in, but they seem to be made by people who understand Godzilla more.

NEW DEPARTMENTS WERE OPENED.
RRRRRRRRRR
GRRRrrrrrr! Bashing stuff up is what Godzilla does best.
NEW FACES WERE BROUGHT IN TO REPLACE THE OLD.
NEW STRATEGIES WERE FORMED.

So what is the essence, for you, of a good Godzilla story?

Godzilla busting shit up for the first 10 minutes; a group of characters who follow him around in jump suits while speculating about his nature; deadly serious Generals at a round table discussing the Godzilla Problem; some kind of new secret weapon which never works well; and Godzilla busting shit up for the final 30 minutes before wandering back into the sea.

As an artist, how do you maintain the stamina needed to produce such endlessly detailed images?

. I'm so stupidly out of shape it's not even funny. I eat like a spoiled 12-year-old, and the only exercise I do is when I go outside for a cigarette. Luckily, I also have the metabolism of a 12-year-old boy, so I'm skinny as a rail. Though, if I were to, say, run a lap around a park, my heart would probably explode in my chest. I've decided that if I can make it to my upcoming 28th birthday, I'm going to start eating vegetables and doing push-ups.

Take us through your drawing process.

Before *Godzilla*, my pencils were a mess, but everything had to be approved by Toho so I had to render things out more. It's a habit that's stuck, so now I'm even slower than before! My process isn't that exciting: pencils, inks, gradient tool. I don't do thumbnails or layouts or anything; it's very bare bones.

There are relatively few examples of successful writer/artists in comics, so how do you stay focused on making script and art work together?

It's hard for me to separate the two, because that's how I've always done it. I think you're able to be more spontaneous with the work when you do both. The big thing with the classic writer/artist dynamic is that the writing is always done first, so in some small way the art always accommodates the script. With only one brain involved, it doesn't have to be that way.

From my experience, there's more freedom in doing everything yourself, but that's not for everybody. Right now, I'm back to work on *Orc Stain*, and also working on a movie poster. One is cool because it's my passion project that I've been itching to get back to, and the other is cool because it features an Indonesian goat demon.

Finally, Godzilla is attacking and you can choose any of his many opponents to take him down – which one do you go for and why?

Hmm. Probably [sentient heroic giant robot] Jet Jaguar from the 1973 film *Godzilla Vs Megaton*, because he seems like a nice guy to hang out with afterwards. And he's got a bangin' theme song: "Godzilla and Jet Jaguar, PUNCH PUNCH PUNCH!"

Jet Jaguar seems like a nice guy to hang out with. And he's got a bangin' theme song

The collected edition of ***Godzilla: Half Century War*** *is out now from IDW.*

HEROGASM

How superhero films began to rule the box office, and what's next. By **Matt Bielby**

To kids brought up on the Marvel and DC comics of the '70s and '80s, the rise of the superhero movie – from a precious smattering of the things, many of them truly terrible – to the present day situation, when they can legitimately be called an entire sub-genre of their own, is nothing less than mind-blowing. But be careful what you wish for: if superhero movies haven't quite started to suck just yet, the danger is ever-present.

There are too many of them, say the naysayers. None of them has a serviceable final act. CGI-action will never match the real-life stuff for thrills. And their women are rarely more than set-dressing.

And it's true that – despite all the top-notch actors and sharp dialogue we now get in the best of the breed – they all tell essentially the same story. It's one where the government – or, at least, huge chunks of it – is corrupt and unreliable, and where it'll come down to a bold self-starter (or, at least, a geek gifted power without working for it, like some *X-Factor* winner) to save us.

And one where, increasingly, the obvious villain (Bane, Frost Giants, Loki, the Mandarin) is actually a distraction, and the *real* bad guy (Talia, Loki, some aliens, Guy Pearce) lurks elsewhere.

It often seems like we're being fed the same meal again and again. (And in the cases of Spider-Man, Superman and Batman, reinvented for every new generation, the fact is – of course – that we are.)

It's now got to the point where superhero movies come in waves. There'd never been a long-underwear film as glum and edgy as Christopher Nolan's doubly spectacular second Batman effort, *The Dark Knight*, before – some would argue that *Man Of Steel* has since trounced it on that front, of course – and when it became a box office smash in 2008, the industry took note. *Watchmen* would be dark, as would *Kick-Ass*; Fox announced that its next *Fantastic Four* film would be less jolly than the first two had been, and the same would go for its reboot of *Spider-Man*.

Inevitably – and just as there'd been in the comics themselves, when things got too conveyor-belt 'grim and gritty' in the '90s – there was a minor backlash. Suddenly superhero films started to get sunnier: *X-Men: First Class*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Green Lantern*, *Thor*.

The X-folk's costumes got bright patches of yellow again, Green Lantern glowed like a jellyfish, and everyone – though, of course, still struggling with minor dark nights of the soul – was keen to leap into action, eager to help. The best balance of light and dark – and the biggest hit by far – was struck by Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* films, and it's their deft approach that almost everyone since has tried to emulate.

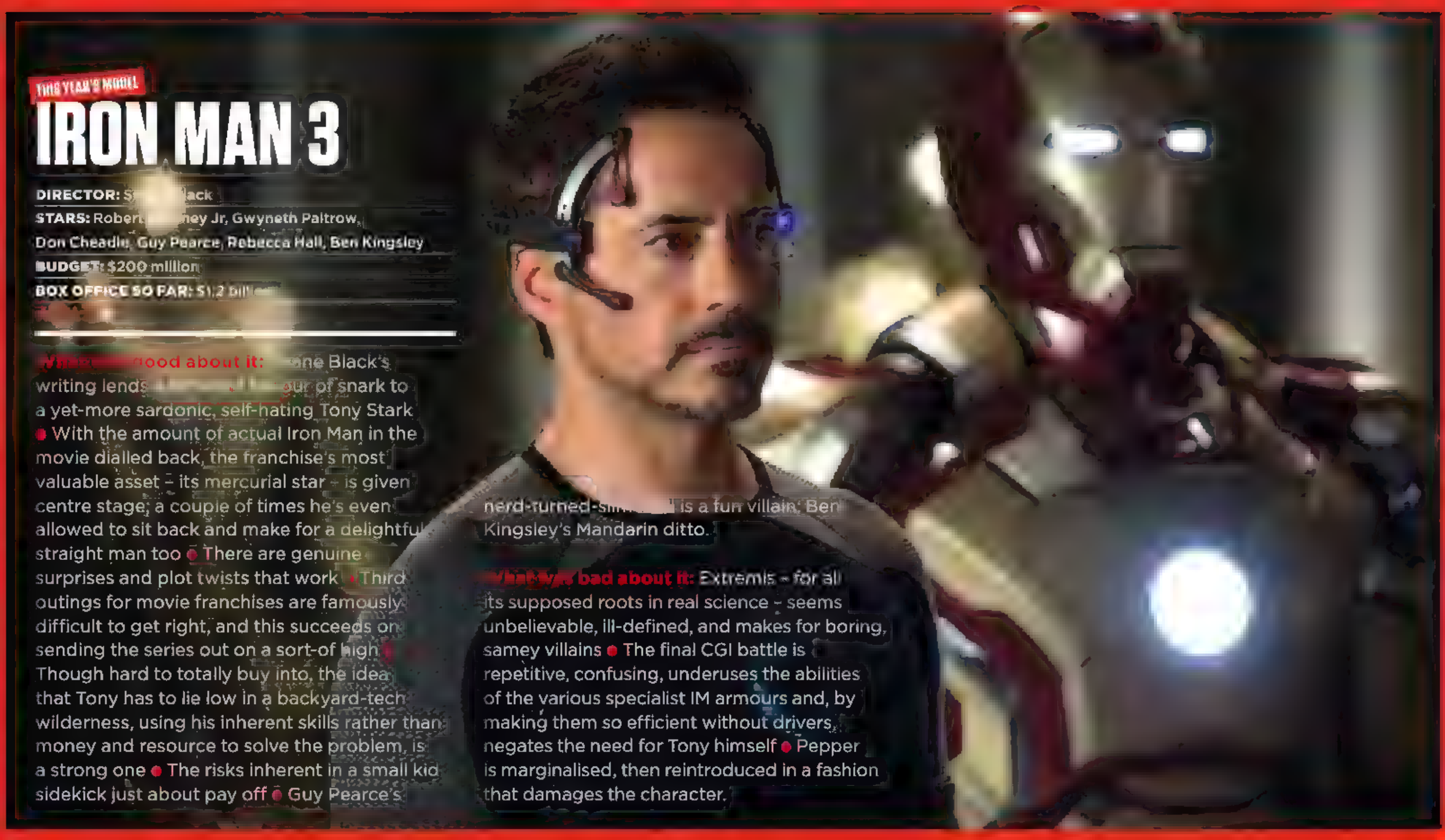
While realistic – with a tilt of the head to real science, even – and set in a recognisable version of the modern world, *Iron Man* remained fun, fast-moving, exciting and hilarious too: a neat trick. And it revolved around conflicts that grew from the characters. Most of all, however, it featured an old-fashioned star performance from Robert Downey Jr as Tony Stark.

Having fun being who he is – but standing on the thrillingly shaky twin foundations of Stark's in-comic booze issues and Downey's real-life drug problems – Iron Man was a hero for our times. We can admire Christian Bale as Batman, but only a lunatic would identify with the guy; Tony, however, has the fancy cars, the house on the cliff, and Pepper Potts to adore him. At the end of the first one he even comes happily clean, telling the world he's Iron Man. Who'd *you* rather be?

METAL GURU

The fact is, *Iron Man* has it right. And that's worrying, because it tempts film-makers to give every subsequent superhero movie the exact same tone – dangerous when many of them share the exact same *plot* too.

"The rise of the superhero movie is nothing less than mind-blowing"



THIS YEAR'S MODEL

IRON MAN 3

DIRECTOR: S[illegible]lack

STARS: Robert[illegible]ney Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow, Don Cheadle, Guy Pearce, Rebecca Hall, Ben Kingsley

BUDGET: $200 million

BOX OFFICE SO FAR: $1.2 bil[illegible]

What was good about it: [illegible]ood about it: [illegible]ne Black's writing lends [illegible]ur of snark to a yet-more sardonic, self-hating Tony Stark ● With the amount of actual Iron Man in the movie dialled back, the franchise's most valuable asset – its mercurial star – is given centre stage; a couple of times he's even allowed to sit back and make for a delightful straight man too ● There are genuine surprises and plot twists that work ● Third outings for movie franchises are famously difficult to get right, and this succeeds on sending the series out on a sort-of high ● Though hard to totally buy into, the idea that Tony has to lie low in a backyard-tech wilderness, using his inherent skills rather than money and resource to solve the problem, is a strong one ● The risks inherent in a small kid sidekick just about pay off ● Guy Pearce's nerd-turned-sil[illegible] is a fun villain; Ben Kingsley's Mandarin ditto.

What was bad about it: Extremis – for all its supposed roots in real science – seems unbelievable, ill-defined, and makes for boring, samey villains ● The final CGI battle is repetitive, confusing, underuses the abilities of the various specialist IM armours and, by making them so efficient without drivers, negates the need for Tony himself ● Pepper is marginalised, then reintroduced in a fashion that damages the character.

» You can certainly see why they're scared of straying from the *IM* model. Though by no means as terrible as popular legend has it, *Green Lantern* showed that even a whiff of camp is a difficult thing to sell to a modern superhero audience; similarly, reaction to *Man Of Steel* shows the dangers of going too far the other way.

Of course, all the major comic book universes have their more serious corners and their sillier ones – look at the difference between a Grant Morrison *JLA* and a Keith Giffen one, say – and so when *The Avengers* movie places a mythical hero like Thor, with all his fairytale lights and magic, right alongside a plausible figure like Iron Man, it's difficult to cry foul. That lunatic contrast, after all, is how comics have always been.

MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Joss Whedon is no fool, of course, and 'own the outlandishness' actually seems like the only realistic approach you can take when making these things – especially when you remember how wide the audience has to be for a film that costs as much as these do.

Kick-Ass has a reported budget of $30m or so, and so could just about afford a smallish core fanbase, one built of keen American comic book readers. *Thor*, on the other hand, cost five times as much – and so had to appeal to vastly more people. Luckily it was deftly pitched and cleaned up overseas, where

THIS YEAR'S MODEL

MAN OF STEEL

DIRECTOR: Zack Snyder

STARS: Henry Cavill, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon, Kevin Costner, Diane Lane, Russell Crowe

BUDGET: $225 million

BOX OFFICE SO FAR: $644 million

★★½☆☆

What was good about it: Man of Steel has a handsome cast, some fine production design, and is good at the inessential details ● The lengthy stretches on Krypton, starring Russell Crowe as Superman's pop, Jor-El, lack sense but contain charisma and surprise ● There are lyrical sequences and pretty photography – shots of our lonely saviour, floating above our world in his burgundy-and blue/black costume, have real backlit splendour.

What was bad about it: The lack of humour – and virtually invisible nature of the bumbling, well-meaning Clark Kent disguise we loved so much from the comics and the Christopher Reeve films – robs the film of heart and fun ● The screwball chemistry between Superman and Lois is nearly non-existent ● The flashback-heavy structure lacks narrative thrust ● The tiresomely super-serious Big Bad's plan – if heartfelt – seems blustering, stupid, and full of holes ● The special effects – while impressive – offer a repetitive slam-bang of meaningless digital destruction ● Superman acts out of character; horrifically so, towards the end ● The product-placement is winceworthy ● Our hero doesn't do anything genuinely heroic once ● The blatant misappropriation of 9/11 imagery flirts with the distasteful – and then embraces it ● At its worst it's exhausting, empty, emotion free and routine; a movie without charm.

THIS YEAR'S MODEL

THE WOLVERINE

DIRECTOR: James Mangold

STARS: Hugh Jackman, Hiroyuki Sanada, Tao Okamoto, Rila Fukushima, Svetlana Khodchenkova

BUDGET: $120 million

BOX OFFICE SO FAR: $150 million (still on release at time of writing)

★★★☆☆

What was good about it: With a relatively low budget, it thankfully rejects the idea of city-destroying pyrotechnics in favour of telling a more human-scale tale • Director James Mangold and his people have an eye for the lovely, and there are some genuinely beautiful-looking scenes • Though CGed to the max, the train chase works (some of the other action sequences less so) • Jackman – while always bizarre casting in the eyes of hardcore comic fans – remained a likeable, gives-it-his-all performer, and holds the centre well; buff too • With four major female roles – indeed, apart from our hero, virtually all the big characters are women – this is a rare superhero movie (or, indeed, summer blockbuster of any type) with any degree of gender parity. (Thank Chris Claremont: he created Yukio and Mariko, helped shape Viper, and often surrounded Wolverine with girls.) • The gleefully violent Yukio is a real asset.

What was not so good about it: Based on an old Wolverine miniseries – his first-ever solo outing, by Chris Claremont and Frank Miller – it tells what now seems like a non-essential not-especially-interesting tale • Dialogue is so-so and the acting is patchy – Svetlana Khodchenkova as Viper is diabolical • It's hard to care about whether Logan gets to keep his healing factor or not – and the way it now seems a swappable quality makes no sense • Logan's solo comic appearances have never worked as well as he does in a team book, and this doesn't buck the trend • The last act, all CGI fighting, is as tedious as it has been in the last half-dozen superhero films.

big effects, a delight in fantasy, and a non-subversive tone mean so much more.

If your lead isn't Batman, it seems a delight in rich colours, a wide appeal – and just enough 'dark' to keep it interesting – is exactly what you need in this business. Or at least, it is if you want to get your money back.

Superhero movies have done the comics they're based on many favours, and one is the way they've dragged 'our stuff' into the imaginations of regular geezers who wouldn't be seen dead in their local comic shop. In the multiplexes we've all sat down together and watched the genre grow up before our eyes. Ten years back, *Daredevil* offered scowling and *Catwoman* crotch-shots; now we get Shakespearean actors, nuanced characters, and messages that occasionally even go beyond the idea that the best way to fix a problem is to punch it.

Nolan's *Batman*, for instance, suggests ill-informed messing may just make a big issue worse, not better; *Iron Man* tells us the way we ultimately define ourselves is through the stuff we make, not the blondes we bed; *Hulk* says anger can be an energy, but you'd better be sure to aim it right.

Wolverine: likes girls, including lovely Yukio.

Yes, the genre still has problems. The 9/11 referencing of late – a trait shared with non-superhero films too, of course – has been grisly. The reliance these films have on the selfish, secretive individual doing what's 'right' – in both senses – is a little Ayn Rand for many people's comfort. And these films rarely explain themselves properly.

Who, apart from keen comic fans, would know that Tim Roth turned into the Abomination and not just 'some big monster' in *The Incredible Hulk*? What, exactly, did the Extremis treatment do? Can bullets hurt Thor? Does Batman fly? (We know he can't, but it half looks like he can in the films.)

With the ground rules so vaguely defined, it's little surprise so much superhero action rapidly becomes meaningless.

But – despite all this – in a world threatened by economic uncertainty and constant mild dread (of ideological extremism then, of religious or governmental extremism now) the appeal of the superhero is clear. Our society, after all, seems not too dissimilar to that which created Superman in the '30s. And if what you're after is simple – probably violent – solutions to complex problems, superheroes have always been your genre. FH

The new General Zod: glum and then some.

“Superhero movies have done the comics they're based on many favours”

COMING ATTRACTIONS

2013-2014 preview

The next year is heaving with yet *more* superhero films. But what to make of them?

KICK-ASS 2

DIRECTOR: Jeff Wadlow

STARS: Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Chlöe Grace Moretz, Jim Carrey

RELEASE: Out Now

What's got us excited: A dark Jim Carrey – he plays the superhero leader Colonel Stars and Stripes – will be something to see ● For all their nastiness, the Mark Millar comics have a strong narrative pull; the closer they stick to that – while toning things down suitably – the stronger it will be

What's got us scared: Director Jeff Wadlow's only other film is the cliché-ridden fight flick *Never Back Down* ● Late in the day, Carrey tweeted how uncomfortable with the film he was following the Sandy Hook Elementary School murders

THOR THE DARK WORLD

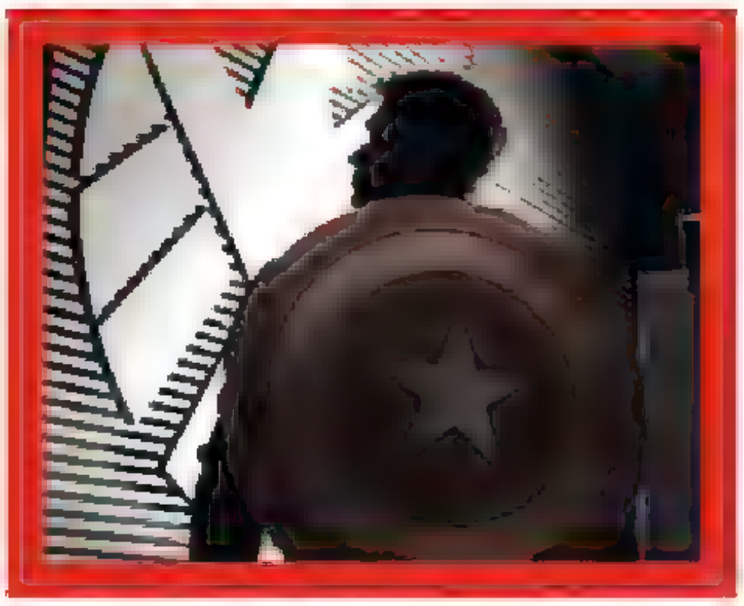
DIRECTOR: Alan Taylor

STARS: Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman, Tom Hiddleston, Idris Elba, Christopher Eccleston

RELEASE: November 2013

What's got us excited: It's loosely based on one of the best Walt Simonson storylines from the best ever run on *Thor*: Christopher Eccleston plays Malekith the Accursed, ruler of the Dark Elves of Svartalfheim – a mystic kingdom hidden beneath the Cotswolds! ● Volstagg's kids were prominent in the Simonson run, and they appear here too ● Basically, the more Simonson is channelled, the happier we'll be

What's got us scared: Alan Taylor, though he's directed great TV – *Game Of Thrones*, *Deadwood* – has never helmed anything approaching a blockbuster movie before



CAPTAIN AMERICA THE WINTER SOLDIER

DIRECTOR: Anthony and Joe Russo

STARS: Chris Evans, Scarlet Johansson, Samuel L Jackson, Robert Redford, Sebastian Stan, Anthony Mackie

RELEASE: April 2014

What's got us excited: This is a Cap/Black Widow team-up, and the whole Ed Brubaker *Winter Soldier* storyline it's based on was one of Marvel's strongest of the past decade ● We get to meet Batroc, the Falcon and Agent 13 too – and we're promised an intriguing '70s political thriller flavour

What's got us scared: Darker themes in superhero films are all very well, but *Man Of Steel* has shown the dangers if you take them too far.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2

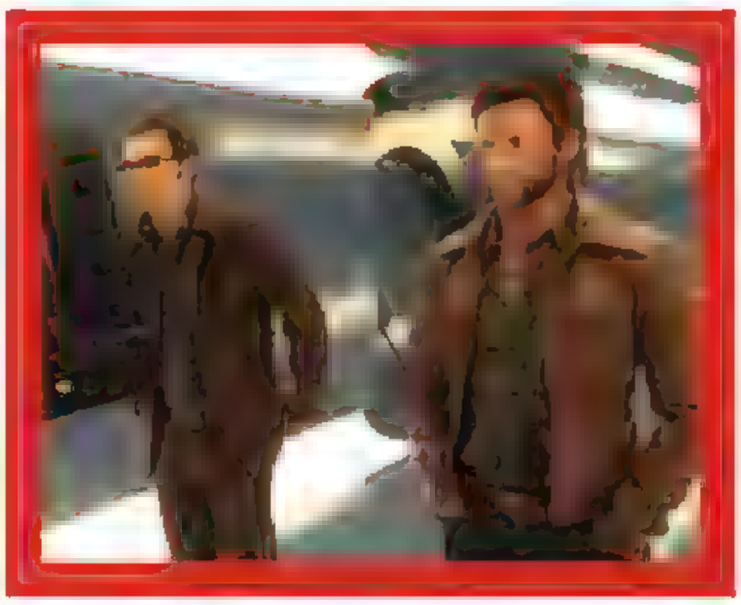
DIRECTOR: Marc Webb

STARS: Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone, Jamie Foxx, Paul Giamatti, Martin Sheen

RELEASE: May 2014

What's got us excited: Garfield and Stone ● The fact it's being filmed entirely in New York suggests the street-level reality essential to a great Spidey story – and Spider-Man was always the long underwear character most like a real person struggling with human-level issues ● Paul Giamatti as the Rhino sounds insane

What's got us scared: The feel and core cast of these *'Amazing'* Spidey adventures are great; their seen-it-all-before nature less so ● The visuals for Foxx's Electro don't impress so far.



X-MEN DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer

STARS: James McAvoy, Patrick Stewart, Michael Fassbender, Ian McKellan, Hugh Jackman, Peter Dinklage, Halle Berry, and many more

RELEASE: May 2014

What's got us excited: Bryan Singer's back, it's flooded with mutants, it's based on arguably the greatest X-Men storyline – and it wowed everyone at San Diego Comic-Con ● Peter Dinklage as Sentinel creator Bolivar Trask is a great addition

What's got us scared: Too many characters? Too much going on? ● That Matthew Vaughan stepped down from his directorial duties is slightly worrying too.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

DIRECTOR: James Gunn

STARS: Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Karen Gillan, Benicio del Toro, John C Reilly, Glenn Close

RELEASE: August 2014

What's got us excited: Superhero films don't just have to be about battles in New York, and this takes us into deep space: Marvel does *Star Wars* ● And then there's that Raccoon

What's got us scared: Guardians of the Galaxy still has zero name recognition with most non-comic fans, and is hardly an A-list property even in Comic-Con terms – or it wasn't 12 months ago ● The lack of a Robert Downey-level star worries ● And then there's that Raccoon.

COMIC HEROES

THE 'BIG' ISSUE

Batman/Superman: together forever – in comics *and* movies!

BIG CREATORS!
John Romita on Spider-Man

Bob Layton on Iron Man

Chris Claremont on X-Men

PLUS!
Death's Head, Doc Savage, Marvel Team-Up and the rise of digital comics

AND COMIC HEROES IS GETTING BIGGER TOO!

More pages!
(We're going up to 164 packed pages of features and strip!)

Better paper!
(We're going glossier, heavier, taller and wider!)

New features!
(More films, more TV, more comics, more everything!)

And more!
There's no more wallet, but loads of amazing new regulars!

On sale
18 October
(Go on, treat yourself)

JOY RIDE

With *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys*, My Chemical Romance star Gerard Way proves he's no one-comic wonder. **By Stephen Jewell**

There's always been a comic book/rock music crossover, from *Kiss* comics of the '70s to Paul McCartney singing about the Titanium Man. But never has a rock star made quite such an assured impact on the medium as former My Chemical Romance frontman Gerard Way.

With the first two series of *The Umbrella Academy* five or so years back, Way proved there were more strings to his bow than music-making, but now he's formed a veritable comic book super-group, recruiting co-writer Shaun Simon and artist Becky Cloonan on his latest Dark Horse offering, *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* – and it's as impressive as *The Umbrella Academy* ever was.

Spinning out of the New Jersey rockers' fourth and final album, *Danger Days*, the six-part series has quickly surpassed all expectations, with May's teaser issue becoming this year's Free Comic Book Day's most sought-after item. Then, having held its own against the summer's inevitable tide of crossover titles from the Big Two, the clamour surrounding June's debut issue continued to build. Make no mistake: this My Chemical Romance spin-off is very much its own project, as well as being one of the summer's hottest comic books.

"I've got to be honest, I've never seen a reaction like this to anything I've been a part of, with people immediately and across the board loving it like that," reflects Way, when we finally catch up with him.

"Obviously some people won't like it, but I've got a feeling it'll be quite a while before we hear from them. I'm stunned, as there wasn't even this kind of reaction to the first *Umbrella Academy*. I personally went into that very confidently, and the reaction was great, but this blows that away.

"It also feels free of hype. Dark Horse did a really cool job in letting people know that this book was coming out, while not overdoing it. So people still got to discover it on their own – it hasn't been jammed down anyone's throats."

Way first began formulating the basic idea for *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* more than a decade ago. It was formally announced by Dark Horse as far back as 2009, and the dystopian rock 'n' roll sci-fi epic has been in the pipeline ever since. Co-writer Shaun Simon once played in a band with My Chemical Romance guitarist Frank Iero, so he's a long-time associate of Way's.

"It's pretty incredible," says Simon, of his first foray into comics. "It's something that's

HEY, YOU EVER WONDERED WHY IT'S JUST BAD GUYS ONSTAGE? I MEAN, THERE'S NO RHYME OR IT'S JUST HIM.
THE NAME'S A PLACEHOLDER. HE HAD SOME X-MEN WEIRD CAR ENGINE REVVED UNION OF MEN AND A SENTIENT WEAPON DANCING ON STAGE
THAT'S WHY HE STARTED THE BAND AND CAME UP WITH THE GALACTIC SHATTER.
"AND THEN HIS MUSIC CAN MAKE THE WEAPON FALL DOWN THE SKY, AND THEN HE CAN USE IT TO WIPE OUT B...I--JUST BLOW THEM ALL UP AND FINALLY BRING US SOME PEACE OUT HERE."
It's up to the mysterious Girl to continue the Killjoys' fight...
PHEW!
STOP THERE!
JEEZ, DON'T YOU HAVE ANY SECRETS...?
TURN AROUND, LET'S HAVE A LOOK.
I'M NOT SURE I LIKE IT WHEN YOU GIVE A GUY A LOOK LIKE THAT.
THE GIRL WHO BURNS WITH THE BRIGHTEST FLAME...
WHAT WOULD THEY...HA? HAVE A PROBLEM WITH COLORED?
DUH, HE WAS THE EASIEST EVERYONE'S BEEN IN A WHILE.
HOLY LEAF!
WOW, HOW DID WE...
NEWS FLASH
BUT YOU DIDN'T...
PHEW!

All images © Dark Horse and respective copyright holders

been in our heads for five years and, having worked on it for that long, you start to lose a lot of perspective – you can't look at it with clean eyes anymore but, from all the press and reviews we've been getting, it's great to know that our work is having such an impact on readers. It really means a lot to us, and it means that we really did know what we were doing in setting out to tell a good story."

"We worked very hard to make sure nobody needed to have the album to understand it"

THE ONLY HOPE FOR ME IS YOU

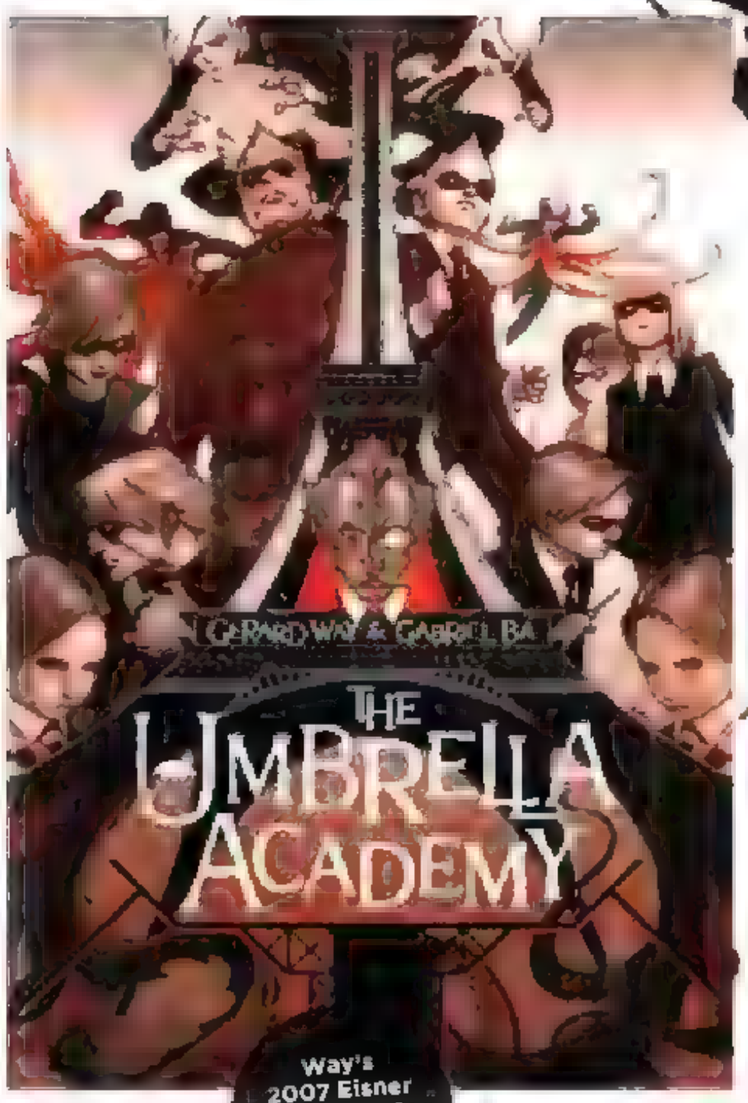
But having flown solo on 2007's *The Umbrella Academy: Apocalypse Suite*, and on its 2008 follow-up *Dallas*, Way took some persuading that writing with someone else this time would be a good idea.

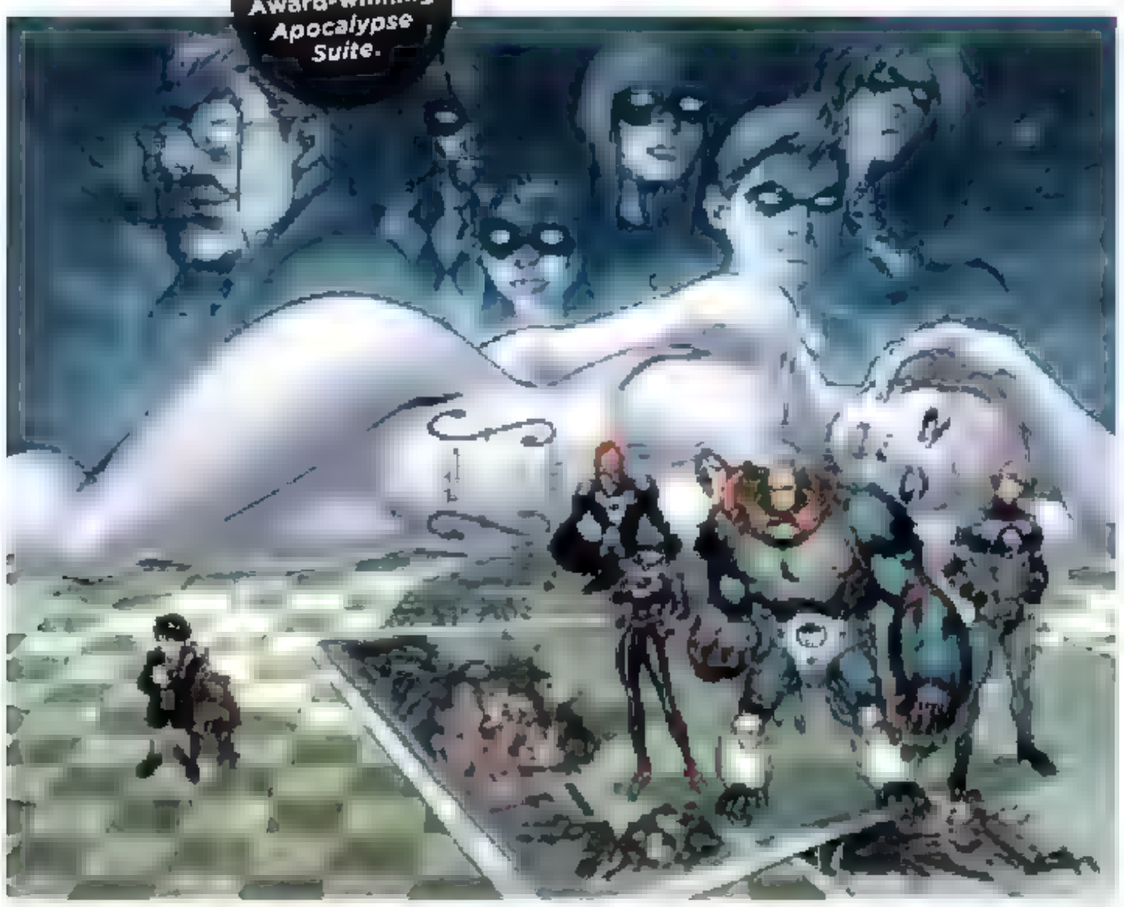
"I had a lot of growing up to do," he admits. "Shaun and I have been friends for a long time, and I've always known how creative he is. He really is an abstract thinker, and that's what I look for in a partner. So one of the things I had to learn was the immediate trust necessary in a collaboration; I had to resist not sitting there and micro-managing everything.

"When I first did *Umbrella Academy*, I had yet to develop a strong relationship with the artist, Gabriel Ba, so a lot of my early scripts were like super-dense, Alan Moore-style paragraphs, which really translates as me trying to control everything that's happening on the page."

Still, once any initial hurdles were overcome, he and Simon hit the ground running. "I started getting stuff back, and straight away there was this feeling that this person may even get it more than I do," Way explains.

"In a really positive way, I guess I just learned to 'love the bomb', and I got really comfortable with collaborating and letting go of the stuff that we were doing together. It felt amazing, as he was chiming in with equal »





Way's 2007 Eisner Award-winning *Apocalypse Suite*.

impact and enthusiasm; the pages would come back different but in a good way, like they were improved."

Despite all this freeform thinking, however, Way and Simon actually stuck closely to the traditional full-script format.

"That was a very strong rule with me from early on, when I was first doing *Umbrella Academy*," Way says. "I was, like, 'There's not going to be any kind of cheating', which is why the original series and then *Dallas* both took so long to write. The difference between a real project and a vanity project is that with a real project there can be no corner-cutting."

Simon agrees. "Another big factor is that Becky didn't just take our scripts and draw exactly what we told her. She put her own twist on it. That's how you get the best work out of anyone. You don't try and restrain them – you believe in them and you let them do their own thing."

Becky Cloonan's CV includes illustrating Brian Wood's *Conan The Barbarian*, and joining forces with Kelly Sue DeConnick on Spidey off-shoot *Osborn* – not to mention creating her own self-published titles like *Demeter* and *Wolves* – so she's nothing if not versatile. Wide-ranging though her career has been, though, *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* is surely the New York-based cartoonist's most high profile assignment yet.

"I'm really psyched that I've been on board this book for so long, and been able to see its development," she says. "There's an aspect of being hands off, as I let Gerard and Shaun do the scripts and then they let me do the thumbnails and hand in the art. I like to think that there's been a lot of collaboration, and we went through a few rounds of back and forth before I dived into it. I wasn't afraid to ask to change things if I saw a better way of doing a particular scene."

LOOK ALIVE, SUNSHINE

Expanding on concepts and characters that first appeared on *Danger Days* and the videos for its singles, like 'Na Na Na', 'Sing' and the Warren Ellis-riffing 'Planetary (GO!)', Way and Simon insist that *The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys* is not just a sequence of glorified album notes, but its own entity.

"To start with, we thought it was going to relate really closely thematically," Way says, "but one of the best parts about this team is the ability of everyone involved to be able to bend in a positive way by dodging bullets, altering paths and changing footing. It relates directly in terms of the storyline, but we worked very hard to make sure that nobody needed to see the videos or to have the album to understand it. You can just pick up the first issue and 'go!'"

"There's no exclusion," adds Cloonan. "It fuses alchemically with the album but, if you know the videos and the lyrics, you'll get more out of it."

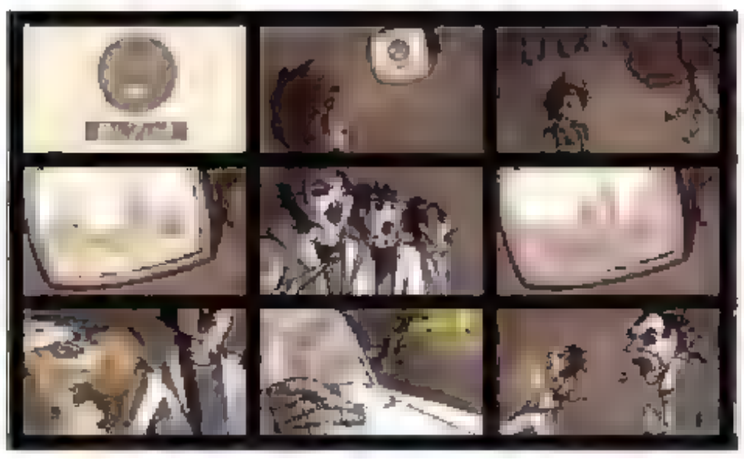
Indeed, there are many subtle details for fans to pick up on – such as the mysterious yellow mask main protagonist the Girl stumbles across in the first issue.

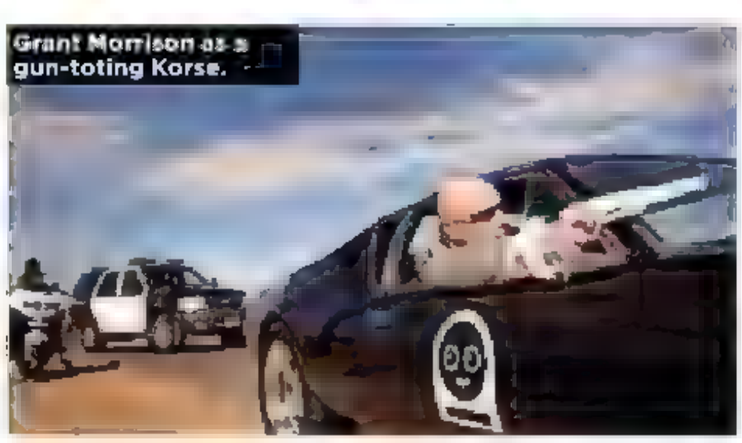
"If you know anything about the videos then you'll get it but, even if you don't, there's a reference to what the mask is. Then you start to see stuff like the mailbox in there. A lot of thought went into those elements. It means that we don't have to over-explain, but it all connects to that world."

Perhaps thanks to her vague moniker and somewhat elusive personality, Cloonan initially struggled to pinpoint exactly who the

FOUR DRACULOIDS— NO SCARECROW CHAPERONES—WITH TWO CIVILIANS! OUTER ZONE ONE! LET'S HIT THE GAS Y'S, THE LAST THING WE NEED IS MORE STATIC.
I'LL GIVE THE ORDERS AROUND HERE, YOU'RE.
...
GIVE IT BACK!
COME GET IT.
THIS IS GONNA BE GOOD! I BET SHE'D DUST 'EM ALL IN A SECOND!
NO! I BET THOSE STUPID DRACS JUST K'LL THEMSELVES WHEN THEY SEE HER!
READY TO FIGHT, LITTLE ONE?
"NOW YOU CAN SHOW US WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT YOU."

He wears that ruffled shirt so well...
KEEP RUNNING
MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
DANGER DAYS THE TRUE LIVES OF THE FABULOUS KILLJOYS
19.11.10





Girl was. "I had a hard time nailing down her design," she says. "I don't know if it was her face, a gesture, her posture or something with her hair, but one day she suddenly kind of looked different. I was like, 'I've finally got it!' I remember showing it to Gerard and Shaun and they both agreed. I think I've still got that very drawing."

"I remember Becky trying really hard to inject something of the Ramones into her silhouette, because that band was so important to this story," adds Way. "I remember seeing her final design and thinking, 'You know, if you look at her in silhouette, it *could* be Johnny Ramone'."

BEST DAY EVER

Another character that Cloonan at first felt daunted by was the sinister Korse, who was brought to life by none other than Grant Morrison in the 'Na Na Na' and 'Sing' videos.

"There's so much crazy shit in this," laughs Way. "The fact that he is in the comic is nuts! I know Grant has put himself in his own comics before, but this is slightly different. He's been very important to the project because, first of all, he's like the point of origin for my influences, with *The Invisibles* and, more importantly, his impact on '90s comics. I'll probably never get over the fact that he's now a character in a comic I wrote, but it really feels like a lot of stuff is now coming full circle."

"Grant's been very important. He's like the point of origin for my influences"

"I met Grant for the first time at New York Comic Con last year," continues Cloonan. "He was introduced to me at a DC party and I was, like, 'I'm drawing you!' It's been really weird, but I've tried to approach it like, on one level, I'm drawing Grant Morrison in his awesome frilly shirt and his kinky outfit, but on another, I'm also drawing the character – and that's always the image that's at the top of my head. He's in the videos, but that's where it ends visually; I'm not drawing Grant Morrison, it's *Korse*."

As Way confirms, though, Morrison really made his presence felt on set...

"Anyone who reads your magazine will probably guess that Grant is a method actor," he laughs. "You'd know this from meeting him, or reading his work. As soon as he was in costume, he got a lot quieter. But when he went into action, he didn't hold anything back. He was really grabbing my face in those scenes. Then he stood rigid in the desert in that heat, and he was the only one not moving. The Draculoids [the project's scary masked stooges] were just goofing around, but he was literally just standing there. I was like, 'Holy shit, he really *is* Korse right now!'"

The True Lives Of The Fabulous Killjoys *is available now.*

HOWARD'S WAY

It's time to talk turkey and examine Howard the Duck; one of the great '70s comic book characters, and one totally dependent on its unique and acerbic writer, Steve Gerber, a man trapped in a world he very much made. **By David Currie**

AS HE DISCOVERS A MOMENT LATER-- HE DOES. FOR, BY DEFINITION, ONE CAN ONLY GO SO FAR IN A WORLD BETWEEN.
IT--IT'S GROUND! SOLID GROUND! I'M SITTING ON THE GROUND!! NOT FALLING--SITTING!
AND THERE'S GRASS--AND TREES--AND BUILDINGS. I'M HOME! I MADE IT!
MISTER, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
OH, SURE-- JUST A LITTLE SHAKY. NATCH, BUT IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK, AN'--
WAAAASH!
I'M BACK ON THE WORLD OF TALKING HAIRLESS APES!
HEY! YOU'RE A DUCK!
THERE AIN'T NO JUSTICE! YA SAVE THE UNIVERSE*, AN' WHAT DOES IT GET YA?
"YOU'RE A DUCK!" --THAT'S WHAT IT GETS YA!
M-MAYBE WE CAN HELP YOU?
IF YA REALLY WANNA HELP, YOU'LL SHUT UP AN' POINT ME TOWARD THE NEAREST CIGAR STORE.
I-IT'S RIGHT AROUND THE BLOCK C'MON WE'LL TAKE YOU!

Brunner's Howard: cartoony yet realistic.

FEAR #19 AND MAN-THING #1.--LEN.

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
4
50¢
68 BIG PAGES
GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING
EXTRA! GORKO THE MAN-FROG
MAY THE FARCE BE WITH YOU!
HOWARD THE DUCK
TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE NEVER MADE!
--STAN LEE
WHAAUGH!
FROM PLAYBOY TO THE VILLAGE VOICE, EVERYBODY IS TALKING ABOUT HOWARD! BUT STEVE GERBER AND GENE COLAN KEEP PRODUCING THIS MONTHLY DOSE OF MADNESS, ANYWAY!
AND NOW A WORD FROM BEVERLY SWITZLER
GET DOWN, AMERICA!
IF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER DOESN'T FEATURE THE DAILY HOWARD COMIC STRIP, CONTACT THE PAPER'S FEATURE EDITOR RIGHT NOW! DEMAND YOUR DUCK! THANK YOU.
--STEVE GERBER
OH WOW!

Howard got a solo strip in *Giant-Size Man-Thing* #4 and #5.

All images © Marvel Comics and respective copyright holders

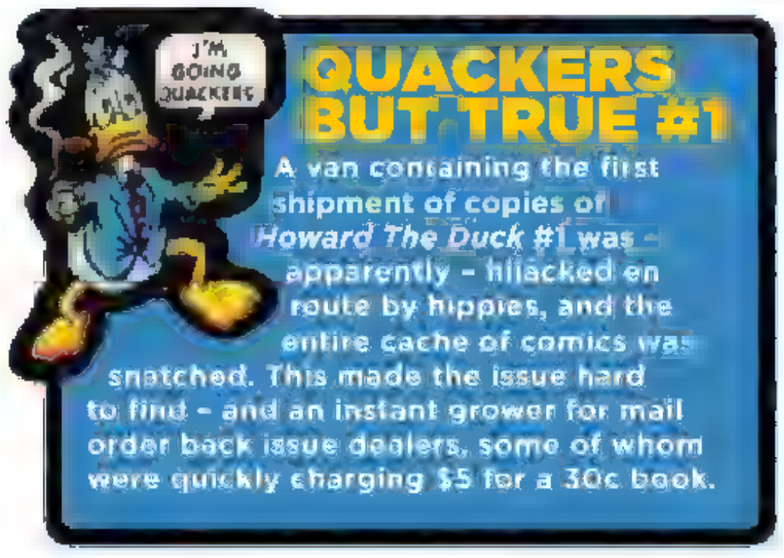
There are few characters quite like Howard the Duck, that brief superstar, a throwaway gag from one of Marvel's more oddball '70s books who simply refused to die, briefly became a pop culture phenomenon, and then disappeared almost as quickly as he came.

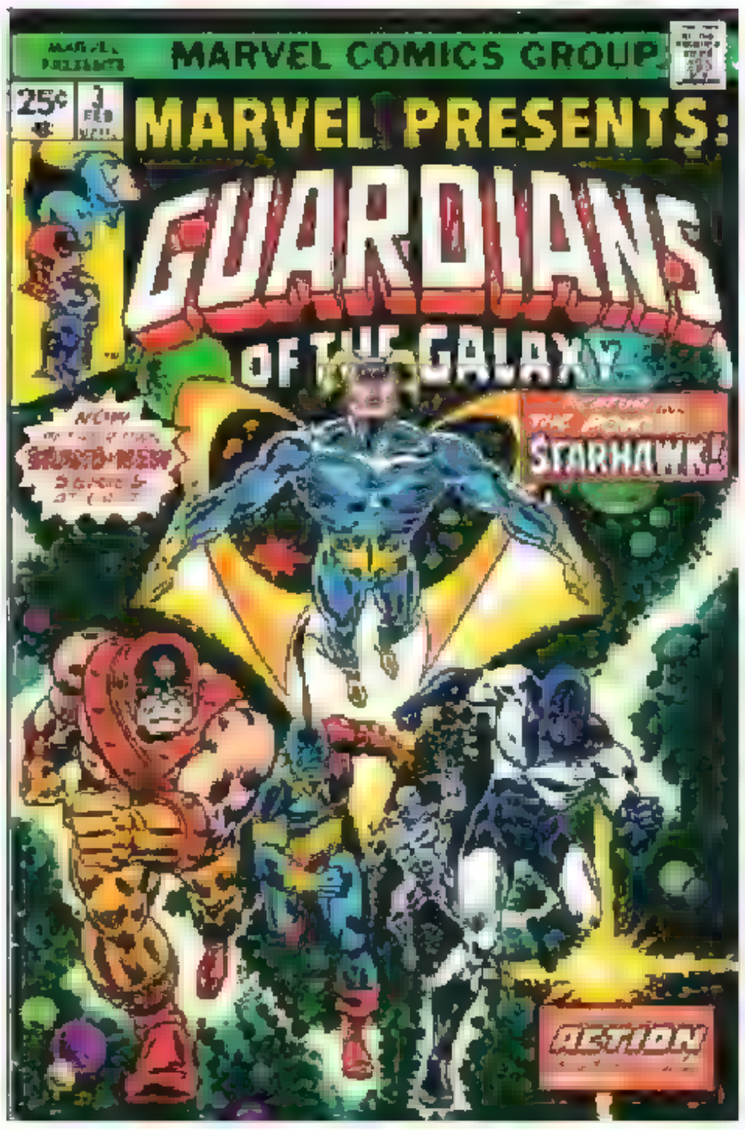
At one point, the opinionated fowl headlined one of Marvel's top-selling books, even out-selling *Spider-Man* for a time. Howard gained exposure in the American national press by running a Presidential campaign in 1976 – America's Bicentennial year – and picking up thousands of real votes (no, really!), before going on to warrant a syndicated daily newspaper strip. (This wasn't much of a hit, but anyway; that it happened at all is remarkable enough.)

Eventually Howard made such a noise – strangely, not a quack; more like a very human groan – that Disney's lawyers felt forced to take action, pressing for clear blue water between Marvel's new star and one of their oldest, Donald. Eventually a compromise was reached, and Howard was forced to wear pants – no, really (again!).

“Howard the Duck was a cultural phenomenon, if only for a brief, bright moment”

The writer and creator of Howard the Duck was one Steve Gerber, a prolific, tongue-in-cheek, audacious and highly original young writer across much of Marvel at the time. Although very much part of a wave of new creators who were pushing the boundaries in what was already an experimental and a rapidly diversifying company – there »


I'M GOING QUACKERS
QUACKERS BUT TRUE #1
A van containing the first shipment of copies of *Howard The Duck* #1 was – apparently – hijacked en route by hippies, and the entire cache of comics was snatched. This made the issue hard to find – and an instant grower for mail order back issue dealers, some of whom were quickly charging $5 for a 30c book.



was Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin, Don McGregor and Barry Smith – what made Gerber unique was his charming tendency to drag whatever character he got his hands on in a distinctly Gerberish direction, quickly using whoever-it-was as a mouthpiece to espouse very personal views and to satirise every aspect he could think of that made up '70s America.

Gerber himself summed this up quite succinctly. "The book is existentialist," he said, "and its main joke is that there is no joke. Life's most serious and most incredibly dumb moments are often distinguishable only by a momentary point of view."

Contrast that with the view of screenwriter Gloria Katz who, when adapting Howard to the screen for his one-and-only, almost irredeemably disastrous George Lucas-produced movie outing in 1986 – a good 10 years too late, but that was the least of its problems – declared: "It's a film about a duck from outer space. It's not supposed to be an existential experience."

Marvel was flooded with protest letters campaigning against the duck's tragic fate

Way to miss the point, Gloria.

So, burn the movie from your mind – and also pretty much every Howard appearance where the writer isn't Steve Gerber. Fact was, no one else ever got – or could write – the guy quite like he could. This was truly a case of the character being an extension of the man, and this – coupled with writing that veered between insanity and genius – made Howard the Duck a cultural phenomenon, if only for a brief, bright moment.

These days Steve Gerber's reputation is almost totally built on Howard, but during his prime time at Marvel – in the early to mid-'70s – he was actually a highly productive and strikingly original writer across many titles and genres. He had a long run on *The Defenders*, during which he revived the Guardians of the Galaxy. He similarly resuscitated a long-forgotten zombie character from Marvel's '50s Atlas era and retooled him as Simon Garth in *Tales Of The Zombie*.

Gerber defined the enigmatic Man-Thing in an epic 39-issue run on that book too – the shambling bog-monster's tale became a signature series of his, and arguably hit its peak in 1974 with the inspiring 'Song-Cry of the Living Dead Man' in *Man-Thing* #12.

But though much of what Gerber did for Marvel was reinvigorate old characters –

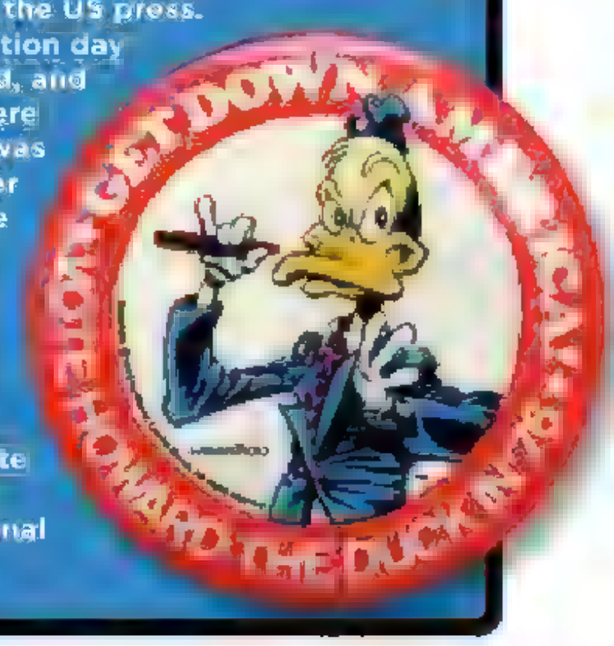
Gerber's *Defenders*: full of charm, and bonkers killer elves.

Perhaps the most famous *Man-Thing* story of them all...

QUACKERS BUT TRUE #2

1976, and America was celebrating its 200th anniversary. It was also an election year and Steve Gerber had a bright idea – why not put Howard up as a possible Presidential candidate? Such were the times that Gerber was allowed to sell campaign buttons (a portrait of Howard along with the phrase 'Get Down America, Vote Howard the Duck in '76') through the letters pages in the *Howard* comic, and the whole idea fast gained momentum. Howard campaigned for President under the All-Night Party and it quickly grabbed the attention of the US press.

When election day came around, and the votes were counted, it was Jimmy Carter who became President – but Howard actually picked up a fair few thousand votes, despite being a totally fictional candidate!

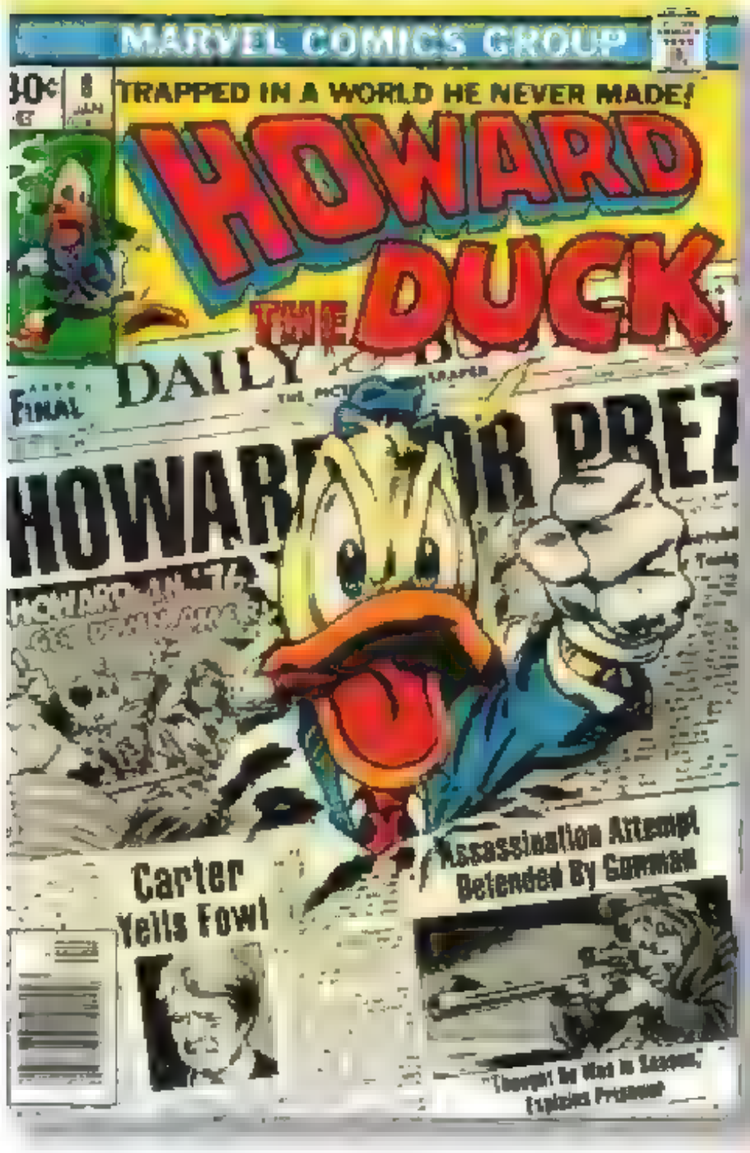


many of them marginal ones – he created the occasional new icon too: Starhawk and Omega the Unknown, certainly, and, of course, Howard the Duck.

A visionary of sorts, Gerber formed a bridge between mainstream superhero comics and the growing underground and 'alternative' press, his work full of invention and risk-taking – in an early Guardians tale in *Marvel Presents* he effectively showed two cosmic beings shagging, but disguised it just enough to fool the then still vibrant Comics Code Authority. Not everyone loved *Howard* – including many in Marvel, creators and suits both – but the hip college kids who wouldn't normally bother with an 'overground' title did, and soon *Howard* was tapping into the adult cultural zeitgeist in a way most mainstream comics can only dream of.

THE DREADED DEADLINE DOOM!

Comic readers love origin tales, and Howard's is a fairly remarkable one. He originally waddled onto the pages of *Man-Thing* as the briefest of throwaway gags – a walk-on role which ended with him seemingly meeting his demise. At this point, Howard's look was defined by artist Val Mayerik as a »

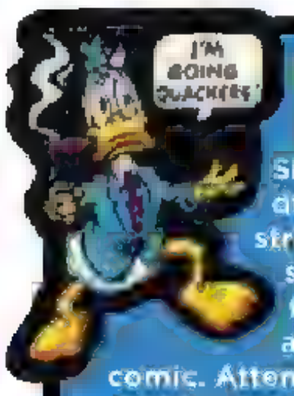


cartoon-like duck in a suit jacket, dotted tie, pork pie hat, white gloves and clutching a smoking cigar – a Donald who was seemingly, and quite seriously, trying to make it in the adult world. It was a look that became the template for all subsequent appearances.

But to the surprise of all, and especially to Gerber, Howard had struck a chord. Suddenly the Marvel offices were flooded with protest letters, all campaigning against the duck's tragic fate. One, in particular, expressed the popular view in no uncertain terms – they'd mailed the corpse of a dead duck to the office with a note that simply read: 'Murderers!'

During his many convention and college appearances of the time, Stan Lee was frequently asked a single question: 'So, when are you bringing the Duck back?' Eventually the requests became so regular and insistent that an apparently baffled Lee was compelled to ask the Marvel editors, "What the hell is this duck people keep asking me about?"

With passions running high, and Marvel thrilled to be making such an – albeit accidental – impact, the company soon did as requested, returning Howard to comics »



QUACKERS BUT TRUE #3

Shortly after Gerber left the duck in 1978, the newspaper strip – never a big hit, and shedding newspapers fast – had been cancelled, along with Howard's colour comic. Attempting to reach an older, and possibly more receptive audience, Marvel began publishing *Howard* in a black-and-white magazine format. Although still graced with the art of Gene Colan, it was completely bereft of the voice of Gerber and the series soon bombed. Just before it did, however – in a classic case of too little too late – the lawyers at Disney finally got their way. A court ruled in Disney's favour and, as a result, Howard would be forced to wear pants in every future comic appearance in order to disassociate him with Donald. But, with Gerber already gone, nobody really cared...

The Last Quack

What was Steve Gerber actually like to work with? We caught up with British artist Phil Winslade, who worked with him on two major later-life projects – *Nevada* for Vertigo and the 2002 *Howard* revival – to find out...

The world turns, and what once seemed impossible now appears very real and achievable again. So it was in the early 2000s as Marvel went through one of its periodic periods of reinvention, and new management attitudes from the likes of Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas made it briefly seem like a place where anything was possible again. *The Avengers* disassembled, the Ultimate universe took shape, and – in a move that surprised everyone – Steve Gerber returned to write *Howard The Duck* for Marvel's new, more adult-oriented Max imprint.

Although this would be his final encounter with his beloved duck character, a clearly reinvigorated Steve Gerber would continue creating comics after this, right up to his untimely death from lung disease in 2008. He was only 60 years old.

Still, from his hospital bed in Las Vegas, Gerber would continue to write *Doctor Fate* for DC until his demise, although his last chapter for the final 'Countdown To Mystery' serial remained uncompleted.

For the *Howard* swansong in 2002, Gerber was joined by British artist Phil Winslade...

Comic Heroes: **Did the comic bug get you early doors?**

Phil Winslade: Oh yes! I grew up just outside London, in a suburb, but we moved around a lot and this led me to drawing from a young age. In the '70s it was that and the telly for me, basically.

The first comic I bought was a UK reprint called *Super Spider-Man*, and I loved the sideways format they briefly used. This, in time, led me to the colour imports, and the first American comic I ever bought was a Jack Kirby issue of *Captain America*, around #195 – a great story with Cap and The Falcon in a *Rollerball* takeoff. And the second US comic I ever bought was – ta-dah! – *Howard The Duck* #2, with the Space Turnip and great art by Frank Brunner.

Because of the sporadic UK distribution of the time, I wasn't able to pick all the *Howard* issues as they came out – I just got a few copies, and the *'Treasury Edition'*. To get your hands on American comics in the UK at the time involved going into a newsagent and asking if they had any, at which point they would bring out from under the counter a big pile held together with an elastic band. The titles they would get would differ from month to month, but I remember also getting a few issues of Gerber's *Man-Thing*, which completely blew me away.

CH: **It sounds like you discovered Marvel at a great time, just when all the young guns were shaking things up a bit...**

PW: The thing about Marvel in the '70s that was so different from comics before – or after – was that you had sophisticated stories told in dumb ways. It was very different to comics in the '80s, say, which were the complete opposite.

Writers like Steve Gerber and Don McGregor were the kings of this – they were putting their lives down on paper, using comics as a vehicle but essentially doing something akin to what The Beatles were doing with music in the '60s, telling their lives through their stories.

Phil Winslade's very detailed Howard art: sexy and *weird*.
I WAS CARRYING SOMETHING...
I WAS QUESTIONING YOU AT THE STATION AND THEN NOTHING. WHO IS THAT MAN? DID I KILL HIM?
NO. IT WAS JANE AUSTEN HERE. BELIEVE THIS IS YOURS

CH: And the creators enjoyed much more control over their work then than they do now...

PW: Yes, during those times the writer of a book was often the editor too – certainly, Gerber was for a time on *Howard* – without anybody else saying you can't do this or that. The comics still had structure, and the obligatory fight scenes, but this period also empowered the writer, giving them far more freedom and – often as not – producing amazing results. Jim Starlin's *Warlock*, for example, is one of the greatest commentaries on Catholic guilt you could ever read!

These comics were breaking boundaries, from Gerber's prog-rock writing to McGregor's *Killraven* being really all about survivors, about finding new roads and learning from the mistakes of the past. *Black Panther*, meanwhile, was tackling race relations. These comics were way ahead of their time; I mean, Gerber talked about global warming in his Guardians of the Galaxy stories in *The Defenders* in 1975!

CH: You first worked with Steve Gerber in 1998 on *Nevada*, a series for DC's Vertigo imprint. How did that all come about?

PW: Well, I knew Vertigo editor Karen Berger through past projects like *Goddess*, and I'd heard about Steve coming to Vertigo with a title called *Nevada*. I sat through an awards show with Karen and, basically, talked her into letting me draw the series.

CH: Did you have much direct contact with Steve during your work together?

PW: We exchanged a few phone calls, which were weird due to the timing. Steve would often phone me at 11am UK time, which would have been about 4am where he was in Las Vegas. I can still hear his voice in my head on the phone going, "Oh, my Gawwd!" At the time he was living with his girlfriend, sleeping on the sofa. He originally went to California to work in animation, and apparently he'd moved to Las Vegas because it was cheaper.

The characters in *Nevada* – the Showgirl and the Ostrich – originally appeared in a famous issue of *Howard The Duck* called 'The Dreaded Deadline Doom'; it was issue #16, I think. That month, Steve was late with his script for Gene Colan to draw because of his relocation to California. Rather than reprint an earlier issue, the common solution to the problem at the time, Steve decided to write an essay about being late which ended up three times the length of a regular strip – and covered his relationship with a talking duck, life, the universe and everything!

The fact that they returned to star in their own series 22 years later was actually due to Neil Gaiman. At a US convention, Gaiman jokingly asked when the Ostrich and the Showgirl were getting their own series and Karen Berger duly took note.

CH: So, this leads us very nicely into the 2002 *Howard The Duck* Marvel Max series, and Gerber's return to writing the duck – which, we believe, you had a hand in...

PW: This was due to a concerted effort by editor Stuart Moore and me to persuade Steve to return to writing Howard, and also to let Marvel publish it. Not an easy task!

Before, I'd been working for Stuart on a number of Marvel projects and he asked me what I would like to do next and I said Steve Gerber's *Howard The Duck*. I knew fellow Brit artist Glenn Fabry, who'd been a great help to me when I first started in the business. I also knew that Glenn loved Howard and told Stuart so.

He brought Glenn in to work on various redesigns of Howard to placate Disney, because Steve had already incurred the wrath of past legal events and was a lot warier than we were. So Glenn worked on modified designs for the duck, little details like changing the bill slightly, producing many variations, and every time we would choose the one that looked closest to the original version of Howard. Eventually, Glenn got so frustrated with all this that he drew a rat.

Steve saw this and said, "Yeah, let's go with that." Steve really didn't want the Disney version of the duck, but when he saw the way I drew him in the first few pages of the first issue he said to me, "I actually really like the way you draw Howard, and he looks different enough to not be mistaken for Donald."

But, by this time, we were committed to drawing Howard the Rat instead. I drew the majority of the series and Glenn did one issue. I did try to get Gene Colan to join us for an issue, but his schedule said otherwise.

CH: Whether it was a rat or a duck, it was still Howard written by Gerber – so how do you feel to have been part of it?

PW: I'm proud to have done it, but it's tinged with regret. With the Howard Max series we really talked Steve into doing it, despite his own reservations, though some great material came out of it – especially, I think, the final issue with Howard having a conversation with God that makes some clever comments on creation, ownership and work for hire. But I think that Steve hoped that Howard would return to the level of popularity he'd enjoyed in the '70s, and when the Max series came out it sold okay but received little or no critical or popular response, and this disappointed Steve greatly.

CH: So he took this personally, because Howard was such an important creation?

PW: Yes, *Howard the Duck* is an extension of Steve Gerber; it really is. And when he was writing it in the '70s it was an incredibly popular character, but this meant it got picked up by a lot of people's radar and attracted so much legal attention it really meant that Steve couldn't work in comics for a long time after.

To my mind, Steve Gerber was a genius and quite a sensitive soul. His favourite LP was *Rubber Soul* by The Beatles, and he could be at once incredibly naive and very worldly-wise. His words, and the man himself, are greatly missed.

MARVEL™ ALL-COLOUR COMICS
9p
2 MAR 02415
TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE NEVER MADE!
HOWARD THE DUCK™
NOTHING CAN SAVE YOU NOW, DUCK--YOU'RE AT THE MERCY OF--
--THE DEADLY SPACE TURNIP!
Strangely, Howard villains are rarely seen in the rest of Marvel!
Stan Lee PRESENTS: HOWARD THE DUCK!™
WRITTEN BY STEVE GERBER ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANK BRUNNER INKING BY STEVE LEIALOHA
TOM ORZECHOWSKI, LETTERING MICHELE WOLFMAN, COLORS MARV WOLFMAN, EDITOR
CRY TURNIP!
IT'S NO USE, BEVERLY... THEY'RE EVERYWHERE! WE'LL HAVE TO ATTEMPT AN ESCAPE!
THAT'S ENCOURAGING.
BY NOW HE PROBABLY THINKS I'VE SKIPPED TOWN.
I WASN'T ALLOWED TO MAKE PHONE CALLS FROM PEI HAI'S TOWER.
WE'D PROBABLY STILL BE THERE IF SPIDER-MAN HADN'T TOLD THAT "CENTER FLOOR" TO COME BACK FOR US.
APEC RATA, THE MAN WHO CAPTURED BOTH HOWARD AND BEV LAST ISSUE... HARK.
HE HAD ME CHAINED UP THERE FOR A MONTH-- EVER SINCE I ANSWERED HIS AD FOR AN ARTIST'S MODEL AND FELL INTO HIS CLUTCHES.
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
ZEN AND THE ART OF COMIC BOOK WRITING
It's the oddest fill-in issue of them all!

in two solo stories in *Man-Thing* where the fall through the void lands him in Cleveland. In these first two solo stories – and in the first two issues of his own series that followed – Howard was drawn by a fine new artist called Frank Brunner, who recalls this time on the character in this issue's World's Finest interview on page 104.

However, for Howard's fourth issue, the definitive Howard team came into play. The great Gene Colan – who'd briefly worked with Gerber on *Daredevil* – had arrived, and would quickly become the artist most associated with the series. The stage was set for a funny-animal revolution!

Colan's art made a bizarrely effective, grounded backdrop for a grumbling everyman duck

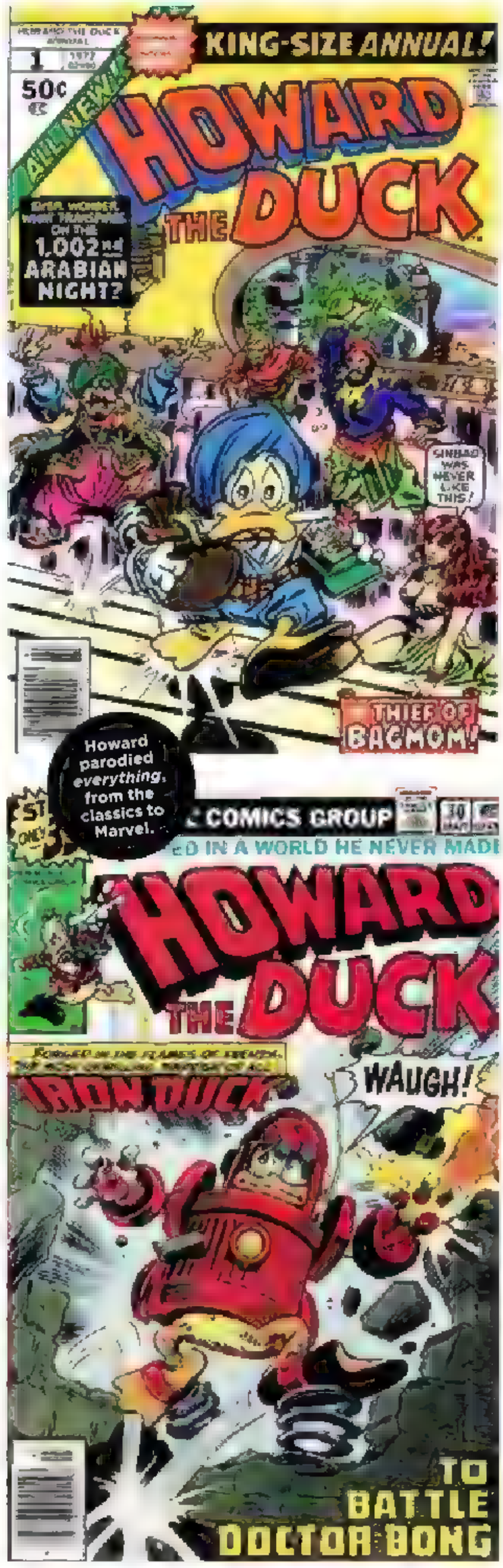
ZEN AND THE ART OF COMIC WRITING

Colan's fluid, dramatic art, refined at this point through many decades of working in comics – he'd pencilled everything from *Captain America* to *Iron Man*, *Doctor Strange* to *Daredevil* – was peaking at this point, and two unlikely '70s series in particular were blowing socks off everywhere. There was *Tomb Of Dracula*, with Marv Wolfman, and there was *Howard*.

Combining strong cinematic staging with ever-punchy lighting and incredibly diverse depictions of human expression, Colan's work may have initially seemed too realistic for such a character – from the cars to the clothes, Colan's '70s looked real in a way few comic book artists could match – but it made for a bizarrely effective, grounded backdrop for a grumbling everyman duck. Couple this with Gerber's satire-stuffed writing, and Howard was on a roll.

As Gene Colan once said, in 2008: "Steve was a very funny guy, and I'd have to stop working in the middle of drawing a Howard strip because I'd be laughing my head off!"

Over the course of the next 23 issues, Gerber and Colan crafted a sharp, funny and often poignant saga of a sensitive soul who just happened to be... well, a little unusual. Despite landing a hot human girlfriend-cum-companion, he seemed the Peter Parker of fowl-kind, unable to catch a break.



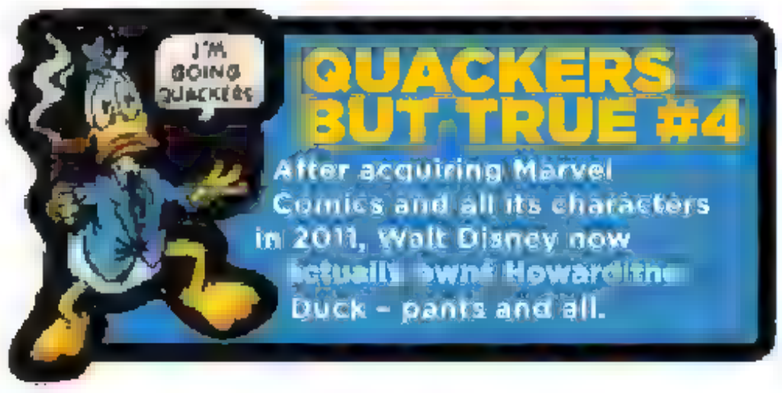
It was all going so well but then – at the height of the title's popularity in 1978, when Howard was appearing not only in his monthly colour comic but also every day in a syndicated newspaper strip – Gerber was unceremoniously fired. What had happened? That his work was unacceptably late – indeed, he was famous for it – seemed to be part of it, but the real crux of the matter appeared to have been ongoing struggles over how much control he could have over his creation when that character is also a wholly-owned company asset. Anyway, he was off the duck – and soon, and for quite some time, out of the offices of Marvel completely.

There then followed a protracted legal battle in which Gerber attempted to take ownership of Howard – a hot topic of the time, with many creators flexing their muscles in this regard, and in his struggle Gerber was aided by many other comic writers and artists who banded together to form FOOG (Friends of Ol' Gerber) and help raise funds for the case. These creators included Jack Kirby – who gave his work free to produce *Destroyer Duck* for Gerber, published through Eclipse Comics.

Eventually, a settlement was reached out of court – just in time, in fact, for the 1984 *Howard The Duck* movie to be released. The fear of generating bad press for the film seemed to have been averted – but, unfortunately, it proved more than capable of generating quite enough bad press on its own…

And Gerber? He found employment in animation and television scriptwriting for a time – he co-wrote an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'Contagion' – then returned to comics to write sporadically for a number of publishers, including Marvel. But never, it seemed to fans, with quite the same creativity and commitment he'd once shown.

Indeed, the success Gerber had enjoyed writing the often-indignant opinions of Howard was never to be repeated, and duck and creator both slid into a world of relative obscurity. Except, of course, for in the minds of anyone who'd ever come across either. These stories are too strange, too individual, too utterly enjoyable for that.


I'M GOING QUACKERS
QUACKERS BUT TRUE #4
After acquiring Marvel Comics and all its characters in 2011, Walt Disney now actually own Howard the Duck – pants and all.

Howard graphic novels are available, with the ***Essential Howard The Duck*** *collection – all the original strips in black-and-white form – a great place to start. For more on Howard, read the Frank Brunner interview on page 104.*

JUDGE JAMES'S COMICS COURTROOM

The Spider-Clone saga: Marvel's greatest misstep, or a bold attempt to do something radically different? **Judge James Lovegrove** presides...

PROSECUTION: Your Honour, before us today we have what is generally considered to be one of the most egregious offences against comics ever perpetrated. I refer, of course, to the 'Clone Saga', which ran on a weekly basis through the Spider-Man family of titles from late 1994 to the end of 1996. It was two years' worth of nonsensical mess, with the creators seemingly making things up as they went along. This may well prove to be a lengthy trial, given the sheer quantity of comics involved, which – counting the regular titles as well as the associated miniseries, crossover tie-ins and spin-offs – number nearly 200.

DEFENCE: Then may I, at the outset, spare us all a lot of time and trouble by entering a plea of not guilty on the grounds of diminished responsibility? By which I mean that nobody involved in the actual creation of the comics wished the 'Clone Saga' to drag on as long as it did. It was intended to last just three months, culminating with *Amazing Spider-Man* #400. However, when sales on all the Spider titles shot up as the storyline unfurled, Marvel's marketing and editorial departments decided to prolong it further in order to capitalise on its success. One could say that, had so many fans not enjoyed the 'Clone Saga' so much, it wouldn't have become the behemoth it did.

PROSECUTION: My learned friend is simply trying to excuse Marvel from its crime by claiming that the company was giving readers more of what they evidently wanted. That does not mitigate the fact that the 'Clone Saga' showed no overarching creative direction and floundered horribly from issue to issue, with characters coming and going at random, plot threads left dangling, and continuity contradictions abounding. Not to mention some truly eye-torturing artwork.

DEFENCE: Some context first. The 'Clone Saga' was originally devised as a response to DC's 'Death Of Superman' and 'Knightfall' 'events', which had resulted in huge sales boosts for all Superman and Batman titles and even garnered headlines in national newspapers. Keen to generate a similar publicity coup for itself, Marvel charged its staff with dreaming up an equivalent for its most popular character. The man responsible for pitching the suggestion that the Spider-Man we all knew and loved was, in fact, a clone, was the then *Web Of Spider-Man* scripter Terry Kavanagh. Most of the other writers at the editorial retreat where this proposal was made reacted with scorn. One, though, championed it: JM DeMatteis, who was writing *Amazing Spider-Man* at the time. He saw great potential in the idea: 'Just the thing we needed to shake the Spider-books up and put the readers on red alert', as he said in his introduction to the *Spider-Man: The Lost Years* trade paperback collection – and helped talk editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco around.

PROSECUTION: It was that easy, then, for Marvel to decide to toss out 35 years of established backstory and start again from scratch? What a callous disregard for loyal Spidey readers who had stuck with the character through thick and thin.

DEFENCE: But Marvel did not do as DC had with Superman and pretend to kill the character off, a cheap publicity gimmick. Rather, it took an established part of Spider-Man continuity and extrapolated a logical extension of it. I'm referring, of course, to the original 'Clone Saga' from 1975, in which Peter Parker's biology professor Miles Warren, aka the Jackal, creates clones of the recently deceased Gwen Stacy and of Peter himself. The

This clone thing is getting silly now...

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
25¢
149
OCT
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
ONE WEB-SLINGER MUST SLAY THE OTHER— OR NED LEEDS IS DOOMED!
EITHER WAY, THE JACKAL WILL HAVE HIS REVENGE!
THE ASTONISHING CLIMAX OF THE SPIDEY-JACKAL WAR...
"EVEN IF I LIVE...I DIE!"

The Jackal pits Spider-Man against, er, Spider-Man...

...and it's not just the web-slinger who gets cloned.

"It was easy for Marvel to toss out 35 years of backstory and start again from scratch"

two cloned Spider-Men do battle but eventually team up in order to fight the Jackal. One is killed by a bomb, which also kills the Jackal, while the remaining wall-crawler lives, safe in the knowledge that he is the original, not the clone, because of his love for Mary Jane, whom he didn't form a relationship with until after the clone was made.

PROSECUTION: So my learned friend is now attempting to divert the blame for the second 'Clone Saga' onto the makers of the first, principally writer Gerry Conway. He is hoping that this piece of legal legerdemain will somehow exonerate the culprits. 'They are innocent because the seeds of their crime were sown by earlier offenders.' Your Honour, I trust you are wiser than to fall for such blatant misdirection tactics.

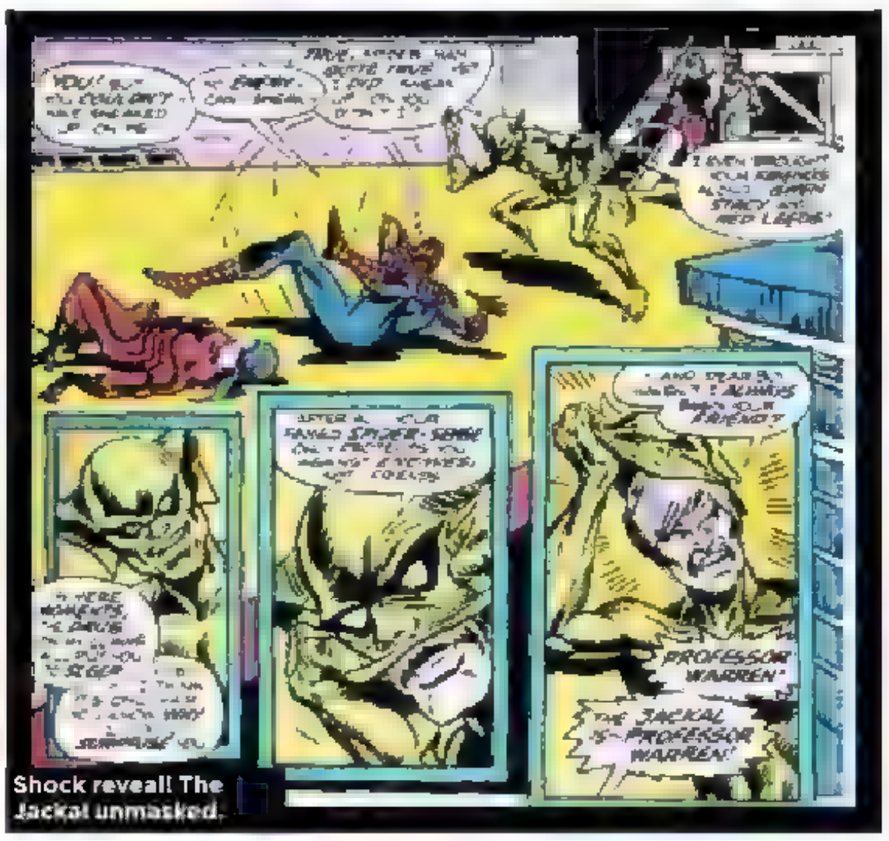
DEFENCE: Far from it. I am simply proving, with evidence, that the second 'Clone Saga' had a legitimate narrative origin. It was a cunning use of a pre-existing episode to forge a brand new story, and was at the same time part of a concerted effort to streamline the Spider-Man mythos, which had become inordinately convoluted over the course of 35 years – a tangled web indeed, much in need of unpicking.

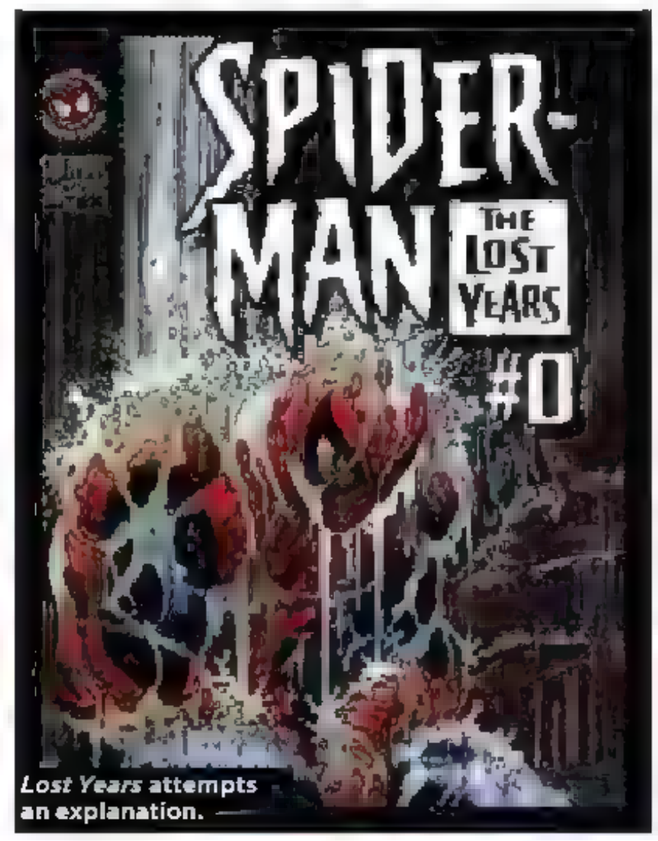
Such reboots and revamps are commonplace nowadays, but back in the mid-'90s were rarer. The principal notion was that the Spider-Man clone did not die in that bomb blast after all, but instead survived. Calling himself Ben Reilly after his uncle's forename and his Aunt May's maiden name, he spends the next five years wandering America until eventually he is drawn back to New York. All this is recounted retrospectively in the rather good *Lost Years* miniseries, which boasts undeniably excellent art from John Romita Jr and Klaus Janson.

PROSECUTION: Granted, *Lost Years* isn't bad – if you can stomach its sometimes cringe-inducing examination of the nature of religious faith via the medium of Mormon cop Jacob Raven. What followed, however, was '90s Marvel at its worst. Ben Reilly and the Peter Parker Spider-Man meet up at the hospital where Aunt May is lying in a coma following a stroke. A strange, omnipotent being appears, who glories in the name Judas Traveller, along with an equally inscrutable figure, Scrier, some kind of soothsayer. These two antagonists have no clearly defined power set or narrative function. They wander through Spidey's life, dropping in and out, as and when. The Spider-Clone then dies again in another bomb explosion – or, as it turns out, doesn't. He dons a blue hoodie and a red spandex jumpsuit and adopts the guise of the Scarlet Spider.

DEFENCE: Yes, Marvel was really pushing the boundaries, wasn't it? As the 'Clone Saga' continues Aunt May dies, and so does perennial Spider-nemesis Doctor Octopus, although »

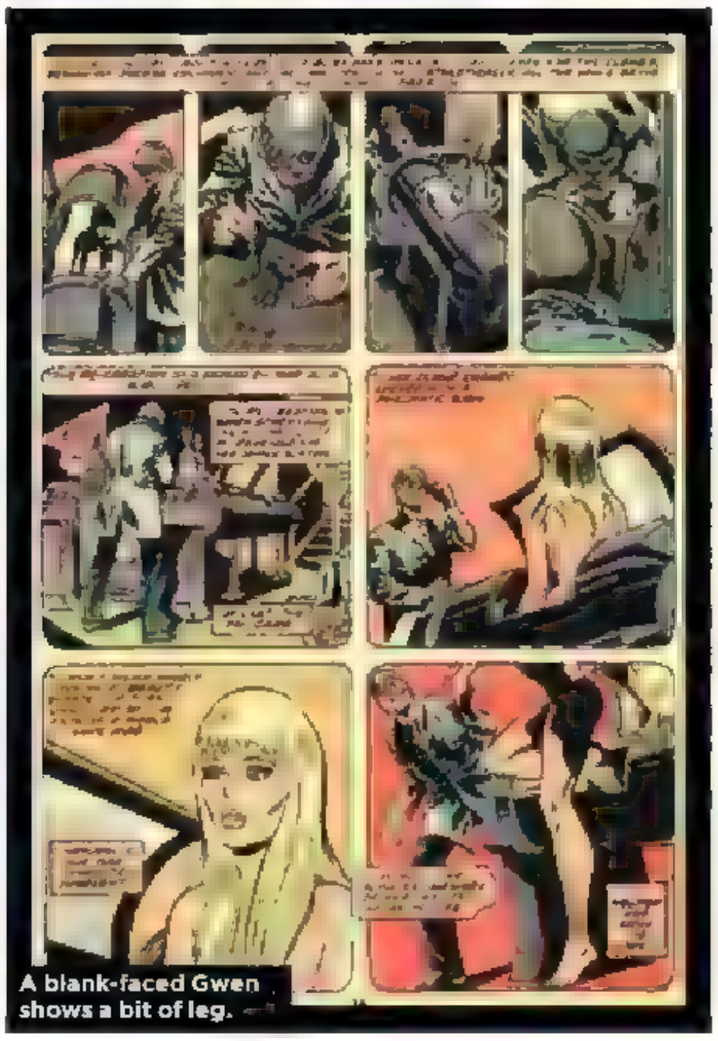
Gwen Stacy shows up again in #144.

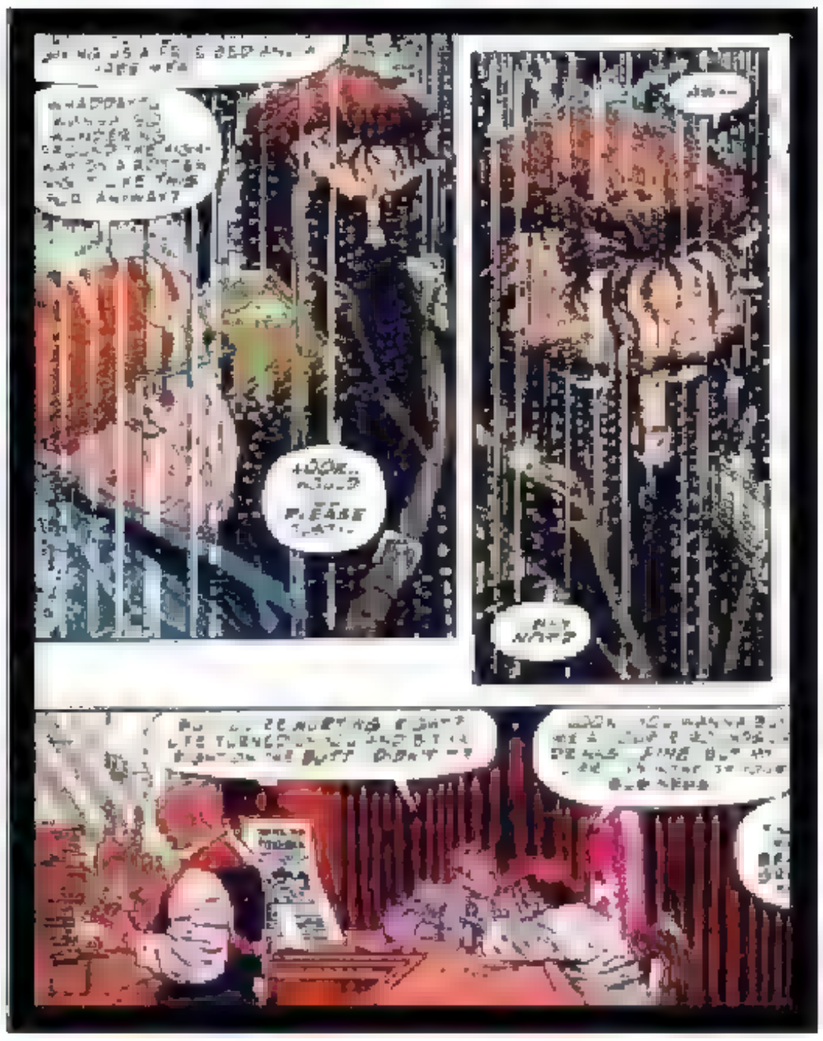

YOU! BUT YOU COULDN'T HAVE SURVIVED!
I EVEN BROUGHT YOUR REMAINS HOME TO STACY AND REED LEARN!
AND TRAINED BY ALIENS IN YOUR TRIBUNE?
AFTER A YEAR FAKED SPIDER-SENSE
PROFESSOR WARREN
THE JACKAL IS PROFESSOR WARREN!
Shock reveal! The Jackal unmasked.



Lost Years attempts an explanation.

Spidey faces up to his doppelganger.


A blank-faced Gwen shows a bit of leg.



he is shortly replaced by a female version. Meanwhile revamped versions of old foes such as Puma and the Owl are introduced, taking their places alongside the Grim Hunter, son of Kraven, and a youthful Vulture who has been rejuvenated by siphoning off the life force of others. It was exciting, innovative stuff, m'lud, as I'm sure you'll agree.

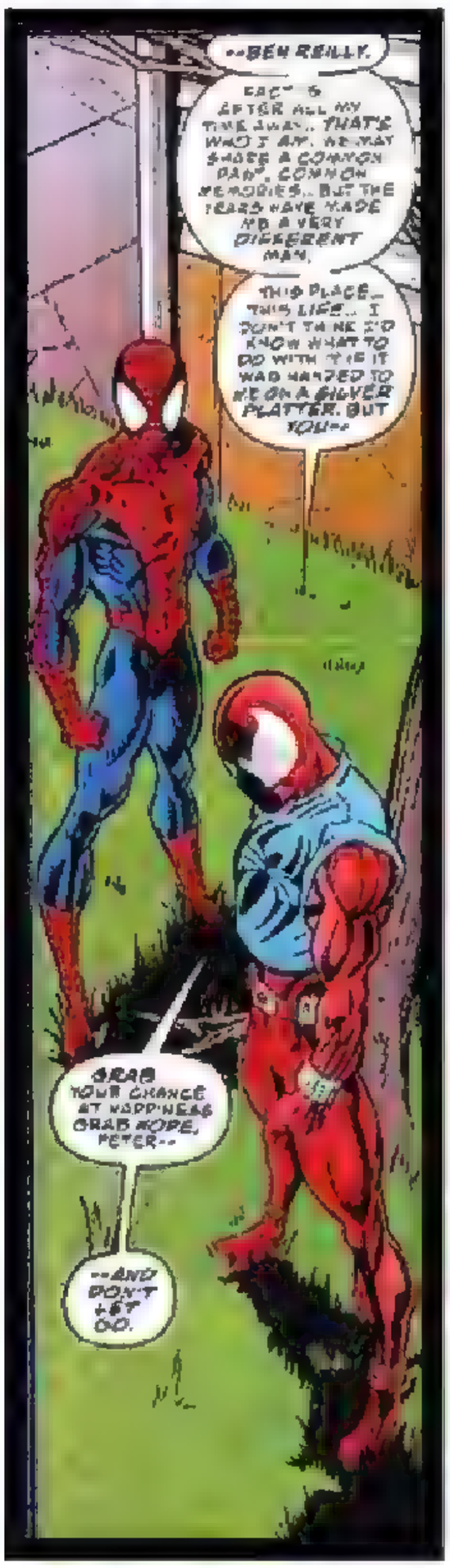
PROSECUTION: Other than fighting, the Scarlet Spider does little, except moon around seeing ghosts of a life which, him being a clone, wasn't and can't be his. Briefly he and Spider-Man are shown to have some kind of psychic connection, but this plot element, like so many others, is quickly dropped. There's also a mysterious, disfigured, vengeful figure called Kaine whose touch burns a web-like scar on the faces of his victims. Is he villain or good guy? Nobody seems to know, not even him. He lurks in the background a lot until, finally, he is revealed as a third Spider-Clone. Strictly speaking he's the first, a failed prototype rejected and cast aside by the Jackal. Then the Jackal himself reappears, not dead after all. As Peter Parker puts it in *Amazing Spider-Man* #399, 'This mess just keeps getting weirder!'

DEFENCE: In the subsequent episode, which appeared in *Spider-Man* #56, comes the devastating revelation that Peter Parker isn't the original Spider-Man, Ben Reilly is. The Jackal implanted memories in Ben that made him think he was the clone. He ruefully explains that it's all been a game to him. 'I was a pathetic man searching... searching... for power... for love.' It's an intriguing, touching moment, some would say.

PROSECUTION: Please accept this sneer as a token of my scorn. Apart from anything else, isn't there something a little toe-curlingly creepy about the Jackal's obsession with Gwen Stacy, which sparked the whole clone plot? He was her professor, she his pupil. Added to that, his characterisation is hopelessly inconsistent. Sometimes he is a wisecracking psychopath like the Joker, at other times a gloating maniac like the Green Goblin. At any rate, while readers were still scratching their heads over who was the real Spider-Man, along comes yet another clone, this one allegedly the real Peter Parker, although he isn't. Soon enough clone number four goes insane and becomes the villainous – and direly named – Spidercide.

DEFENCE: Scrier gives Spidercide the power to shape-shift and regenerate, making the character visually interesting, especially when he's drawn by the *Spectacular Spider-Man* art team of Sal Buscema and Bill Sienkiewicz They're an unusual pairing of penciller and inker, but together they mesh well and produce dynamic, fascinating pages.

PROSECUTION: Unlike *Amazing Spider-Man*'s regular penciller Mark Bagley, whose main talent, it would seem, is that he can produce work to order quickly. His art is typical of Marvel at that time, when its house style aped the look of the nascent Image line, all sharp planes and excessive crosshatching. But we should continue to focus on the writing rather than the art, because it's there that the real fault lies. Egged on by Marvel's management, the writers' job was to keep spinning the storyline out further and further, well beyond its natural lifespan. Peter Parker is put on trial for the killings committed by Kaine, with whom he shares identical fingerprints. When Kaine confesses and Peter is acquitted, there's another ludicrous twist. Mary Jane is pregnant, and in order to establish if the father of her baby is a clone or the real


--BEN REILLY.
EACH IS AFTER ALL MY TIME AWAY.. THAT'S WHO I AM. WE MAY SHARE A COMMON PAST. COMMON MEMORIES.. BUT THE YEARS HAVE MADE ME A VERY DIFFERENT MAN.
THIS PLACE... THIS LIFE... I DON'T THINK I'D KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT IF IT WAS HANDED TO ME ON A SILVER PLATTER. BUT YOU--
GRAB YOUR CHANCE AT HAPPINESS GRAB HOPE, PETER--
--AND DON'T LET GO.

❝ Readers began howling with outrage, as did some of the Spider-writers ❞

deal, the two Spider-Men have their blood tested – and it turns out that Ben Reilly is actually the original, Peter Parker the clone. The sense of flailing creative desperation is almost palpable here.

DEFENCE: Marvel's comics have always had a soap operatic streak. I think you'll find, m'lud, that far more bizarre things than this have happened in daytime television dramas.

PROSECUTION: It only serves to demonstrate how little editorial oversight and control there was. Such was the chaos that JM DeMatteis himself resigned, frustrated that he was unable to pursue his own storylines because the 'Clone Saga' – which he, ironically, had been instrumental in initiating – kept getting in the way.

DEFENCE: Marvel has since learned its lesson, and subsequent crossovers and events have been more tightly and rigorously plotted.

PROSECUTION: The original plan was that when the dust had settled Ben Reilly would don the mantle of Spider-Man, while Peter Parker retired to Portland with Mary Jane to raise a family. Readers, however, began howling with outrage, as did some of the Spider-writers, including new *Sensational Spider-Man* scripter, Dan Jurgens. There could be only one Spidey, everyone felt, and that was Peter Parker. Hence, the 'Clone Saga' was concluded in the same fashion that it had been conducted throughout: clumsily. It is shown that Norman Osborn, the original Green Goblin, is still alive and has been masterminding the whole affair. He switched the test results, which led Peter and Ben to believe that they were, respectively, the original and the clone. Or is it the clone and the original? At any rate, Ben Reilly's body crumbles to dust, like all the other clones did, confirming Peter Parker, once and for all, as the true Spider-Man.

DEFENCE: To be fair, Bob Budiansky, who had taken over as editor-in-chief, objected to the Green Goblin being involved at all, saying in a memo that 'Norman's death should never be undone, in my opinion. It's too classic... Let him rest in peace.' But he was then fired, and the plan went ahead. The ending to the whole saga was, I admit, compromised, not to mention controversial, but at least the status quo ante was restored.

PROSECUTION: Which begs the question, why did Marvel bother?

DEFENCE: Ah, that is the wonder and majesty of comics, isn't it?

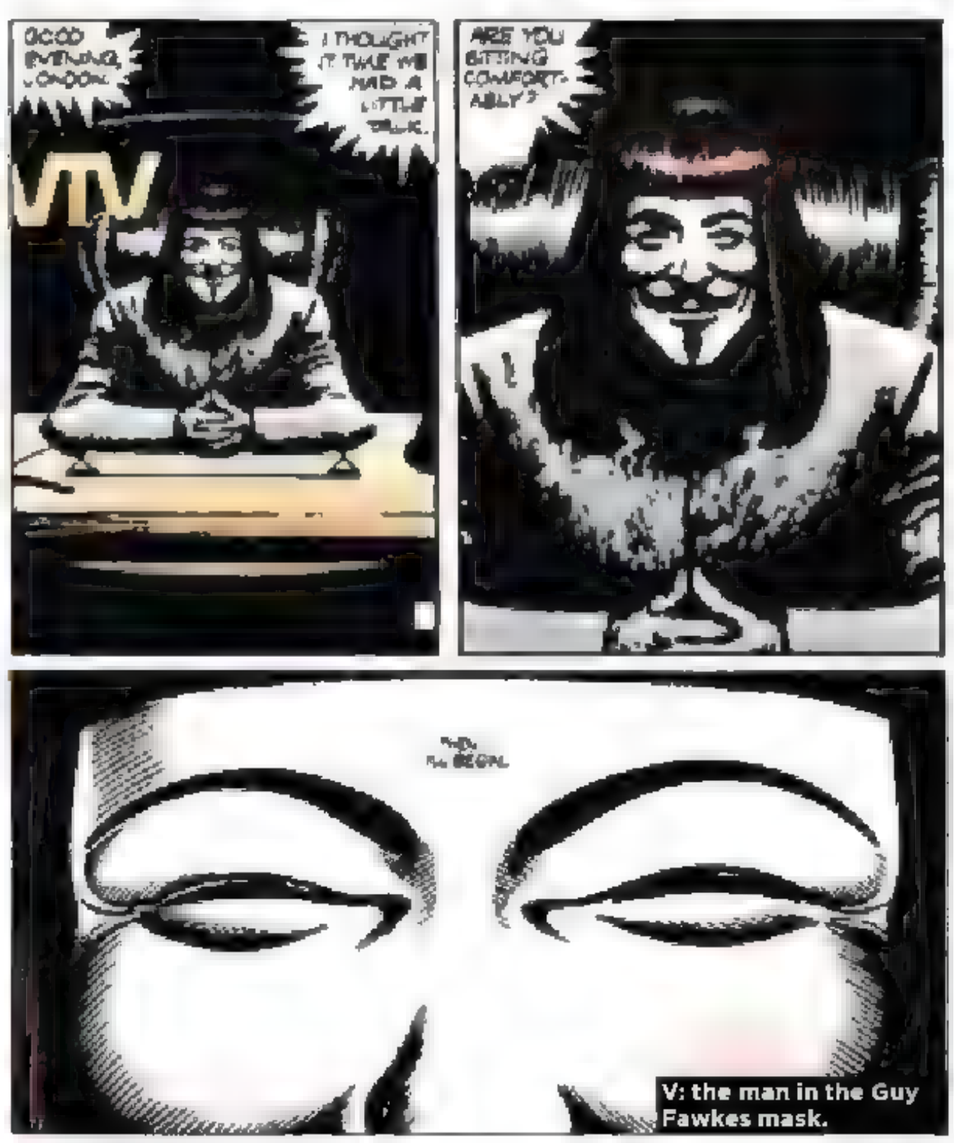
IN THE DOCK NEXT TIME:
In the dock next time: Mark Millar's ***Trouble****. Aunt May as a horny teen? The mind boggles.*

BEHIND THE PAINTED SMILE

A giant of British comics, David Lloyd is responsible for one of our few truly iconic strips – *V For Vendetta* – and is now pioneering new ways for the medium to reach its audience. **By David Currie**

Valley Of Shadows: — A David Jackson team-up for *Aces Weekly*.

Lloyd's a fan of the chiaroscuro style.



V: the man in the Guy Fawkes mask.

Images © DC Comics and respective copyright holders

David Lloyd is a true stalwart of the British comics industry, a master craftsman and bold visionary whose art gave rise to an iconic image that became part of our visual language.

Life imitated art a few years back, as the Occupy movement – organised protest groups that set up camp in Wall Street originally, then spread through the Western capitals – adopted the Guy Fawkes mask Lloyd first drew in the celebrated '80s dystopian adventure *V For Vendetta* as a symbol of their dissent. Its appearance was prophetic, timely, playful – and not a little sinister. Lloyd's writer and co-creator on the original strip, Alan Moore, may have disowned the 2005 movie version that these masks were originally created for, but both creators must have smiled a little to see life imitate their art in so dramatic a fashion.

Lloyd's drawing – whatever the project – tends towards the tense, the dramatic and the grittily realistic, heaving with deep shadows and odd-angled views that draw the reader into an emotional wasteland of dimly-lit alleys and urban intrigue.

It found its perfect platform in *V For Vendetta*, but Lloyd's career covers many decades and he's still very active in comics today, his direct, merciless style perfect for horror tales, war stories and the like.

Fiercely independent and passionate about the potential of comics, Lloyd has recently

Lloyd's first gig, *Logan's Run*.

Night Raven concept art – '30s pulp-style.

Lloyd's 1979 take on superheroes...

NIGHT-RAVEN
NIGHT-TIME IN THE CITY, IN A DOWNTOWN HOTEL ROOM A HIGH LEVEL BUSINESS CONFERENCE APPROACHES STALEMATE...
BE FAIR, GRANACCI... WHY SHOULD WE GIVE UP OUR EAST SIDE OPERATIONS FOR A PUNK LIKE CAGNIOLE ?
WE GOT PLANS FOR THE KID, HE'S DOIN' WELL... WE DON'T WANT HIM SQUEEZED BY YOUR GUYS OVER THERE...
PARKHOUSE ILLUSTRATIONS
YOU GOT ANY IDEA HOW LONG THOSE OPERATIONS TOOK TO SET UP? THREE YEARS... THREE HARD YEARS!
AND FOR WHAT? WHAT'S YOUR PAY-OFF? WE'RE OFFERING YOU A NEW SLICE OF TERRITORY AND AN INTEREST IN THE BREWERY... YOU CAN HARDLY REFUSE...
THESE DECISIONS CAN'T BE HURRIED, GRANACCI... BE REASONABLE. WHAT DO YOU THINK, DON CASTILLIO... DO WE AMALGAMATE OR NOT ?
FRANKLY... I THINK THE WHOLE IDEA'S RUBBISH!
WHAAT?
YOU... YOU'RE NOT DON CASTILLIO!
QUICK... FINISH HIM!
BAM!
UUNNHH!
DAT TABLE WON'T SAVE 'IM... THIS BABY'LL TEAR 'IM APART!

Dez Skinn and Lloyd's *Night Raven*.

gone online to connect with new audiences through original work presented exclusively digitally; the fruit of this particular struggle, an online creation called *Aces Weekly* has, to some degree, reinvented the weekly British anthology comic.

Comic Heroes: Can we start with the early days, and what first inspired you to draw?
David Lloyd: I was born in Enfield, and had an older brother who also liked comics – but not as much as me! We both went to Saturday kids' matinees at the cinema, where we saw the original black-and-white *Batman* movie serials with Lewis Wilson as Batman. This was around 1958, and I'd guess I was eight years old at the time.

CH: That was the original 1943 Columbia serial, with floppy bat-ears and all?
DL: Yes, but what it lacked in production values it more than made up for in style. Those stories were full of energy and panache, and with none of the bullshit you see in modern *Batman* films. They were 15-minute episodes, with lots of punch-ups and they always ended on a cliffhanger. When I look back on those serials today, I still feel they have more energy and guts than all the modern takes on the character.

Those movies were my real early inspiration – for me, the actual comics were a kind of add-on, at least until the art I was seeing reached a certain standard. It was then that I realised how great art was as a device for storytelling as well as illustration, and I started to link the two together. I can't recall when I started drawing; I just picked up the pencil as a kid and never stopped.

CH: What was your first published work?
DL: Well, the job I consider the big break which really started my career was, of all things, *Logan's Run* back in 1977. It was done for a publisher called Brown Watson who did hardback children's annuals. I'd submitted some samples previously, based around a TV show called *The Magician*, but my ability wasn't ready to implement the job properly then – that's the best way I can put it. But a year later, thanks to better preparation, I landed the *Logan's Run Annual* and drew all the illustrations and strips for that book, based on the TV show version of the time. That was the stepping-stone.

The next work I did was for [Hammer Films-centric horror movie magazine] *Halls Of Horror* – it was an adaptation of a

Lloyd and Jamie Delano's *Night Raven* prequel *House Of Cards*.

movie-version of a TV serial – and then *TV Comic*, where I did a few episodes of *Kojak* before working on an original strip called *The Kicktail Kid*. This is still probably the only regular superhero strip I've done! He had a rocket-propelled skateboard and would fly through the air in a costume, fighting crime in the American Midwest.

I think it's fantastic that something I created has had such an impact

CH: During the late '70s you worked for Marvel UK on the weekly *Hulk Comic* during a very interesting period, with Dez Skinn coming in as editor and sourcing new material from the UK.

DL: For the first 20 issues, at least, *Hulk Comic* was all completely original material, with people like Dave Gibbons doing Hulk, Steve Dillon on Nick Fury, and also a few brand new characters, like the one I worked on, Night Raven.

I'd worked with Dez on *Halls Of Horror* and he remembered me. He and Steve Parkhouse had come up with a new character called Night Raven, and they were looking for an artist for that. Dez told me I was free to visualise the character, so I developed the mask, insignia and the branding. I saw him very much in the Marvel action hero mould, and that's how I originally drew him. But he didn't look that way in the final published version – and wouldn't, in fact, until the book *Night Raven: House Of Cards*, a prequel that Jaime Delano and I worked on years later, in the '90s.

On *House Of Cards* I did Night Raven the way I'd wanted to do him in the first place. I'd had a vision for the character that Dez and Steve simply didn't want, so I'd first drawn him looking a little like Indiana Jones, but before Indiana Jones actually existed – all leather jacket and ropes. They wanted him to be a mix of the Spirit and the Shadow though, so that's how he'd finally appeared in his early stories.

CH: Of course, this early connection with Dez Skinn would eventually lead to the publication of your greatest work, *V For Vendetta*...

DL: Dez was so passionate about comics, and always wanted to do his own thing. After he left Marvel he set up his own company, Quality Communications, and his first periodical there was *Warrior*, a monthly

Lloyd's first *V For Vendetta* sketches.

V first appeared in Dez Skinn's *Warrior*.

The V mask: a global symbol for protest.

black-and-white anthology magazine. He wanted to use the kind of character mix he'd used in *Hulk Comic*, with creators like Steve Dillon and Steve Moore but completely new characters.

But Dez couldn't offer the page rates major publishers could because he was independent, so the compensation he offered to his contributors was that we had complete creative freedom to do what we wanted to do, and we owned the characters we created. *V For Vendetta* would not have existed without this freedom to do whatever the hell we liked.

CH: **Were the *V* scripts you got from Alan Moore as intensely detailed – with page after page of description of a single panel – as they're renowned to be?**

DL: They weren't as detailed as I hear he's produced for others, no. And neither of us knew how the story was going to end when we started! The element of *V* that was detailed, however, was the outline of the world it was set in. Alan had worked out this fantastic universe where this character would live, and how it had all come to be after a nuclear interchange; these background materials detailed what happens to society, and the world that was left.

Germany in the '30s – after hyper-inflation and massive unemployment – was very much the model for the world in *V For Vendetta*. It offered up a similar reason for the rise of fascism, with the people reaching out for a saviour, not really caring if he was a monster because they needed saving. We translated that to a future Britain.

CH: **How did the final design for *V*'s iconic mask come to you?**

DL: I went through a few designs which either didn't work or weren't satisfactory for the character. The Guy Fawkes thing was just one of those crazy brainwaves you have and it worked – it fit perfectly with what we wanted to do. And, of course, that design kicked off a lot of creative developments.

CH: **A few years back, the mask began to appear across media worldwide, when it was adopted by the Anonymous section of the Occupy movement. When were you first aware of this happening, and was it something that pleased you?**

DL: The time is difficult to specify. I was sent messages from people saying, 'Hey, look what's happening here', before I even knew anything about the Occupy movement, but I'd guess I first saw them around five years ago.

I think it's fantastic that something I created has had such an impact – and that use of the mask shares the spirit and the philosophy of the original work. Though people are using it for different reasons, it remains an all-purpose symbol of resistance to oppression – something that is very important for us all.

It's not good for any medium to be dominated by just two major companies

CH: So a comic visual created in the '80s is resurrected in the 21st century to embody a new variation on the 'struggle against oppression'. Is this a case of reality catching up with fiction?

DL: Yes, and I don't really know how that happened – but I guess the movie helped.

CH: Speaking of the film, did you feel it succeeded in capturing the spirit of the original work?

DL: I think it's a really good piece of cinema. It's a different version of *V* because they made so many changes, but the central core is true to the book – and it spread the message of *V* so widely and so effectively that I'm sure that use of the mask in public would not have happened if not for the movie. It reached far more people than the graphic novel could have done. Cinema is massive; it gets everywhere.

I feel the film is a great homage to the original; it was made by people who understood the work, and were passionate enough to make a movie that will last, because it speaks for a portion of society and certain philosophical ideas.

I consider *V For Vendetta* the most important work I've ever done.

CH: Back to your everyday life, what's your output when you're producing pages these days?

DL: I pencil and ink all my own work; the only time someone else inked my pencils it turned into a bad experience. I generally draw one completed page every two days. I can work faster than that if I have to, but you don't really want to be doing that.

CH: Your last major work in print was the crime story, *Kickback*, about six or seven years ago...

DL: I thought it was a great original graphic novel, originally published in France, but it was let down big-time by its US publisher, Dark Horse. They dropped the ball and did absolutely no promotion for it at all, despite the fact it was released the same year the *V For Vendetta* movie came out. Luckily, their contract on the book has expired, and you can now get *Kickback* as an app, with an added commentary.

CH: With all this new technology about, do you feel the traditional comic book publisher's power and control is weakening?

DL: Well, I don't know. The means of distribution and control are always held by big companies, and Marvel and DC have been running the show for many decades.

THEY HELD HIM DOWN
THEY STRIPPED HIM AND ANOINTED HIM
AND THEY RAISED HIM UP AND DRESSED HIM IN HIS ROBES OF OFFICE
AND PAINTED HIS FACE
AND WHISPERED HIS NAME IN REVERENCE TONES
"Archbishop"
"Archbishop Bomb"
"Archbishop Bomb"

A Lloyd and Grant Morrison team-up for *Hellblazer* #25-26.

Lloyd's take on the chain-smoking Constantine.

And there's nothing really to keep them from running the show for more decades to come. I've got nothing against DC, though: it's all been good experiences with them, and if it weren't for DC, *V* certainly wouldn't be where it is now.

But the point is this: it's not good for any medium to be dominated by just two major companies that decide how the public perceives the medium. Which is generally a bunch of superheroes running around – everything else is sidelined or second choice. Of course, the movies have heightened this perception – it's all about source material for Hollywood.

I think it's an issue that, in this portion of the globe, when you say 'comics' to people they think of superheroes or *The Beano*, whereas if you said 'literature' or 'novels' they would have a whole range of things in their heads. It's problematic for a medium that has fantastic potential.

CH: It's the very word 'comics', isn't it? Will Eisner tried to address this in the '70s, when he coined the term 'sequential art' as a possible replacement.

DL: I absolutely agree. I actually did a conference recently where I said we should all try and ditch the term 'comics' and start using 'sequential art' as much as possible – let's just slide it into the language. Of course, the phrase 'graphic novel', which really came about by accident, has been tremendously useful in helping to change people's perceptions, and in gaining recognition from the literary establishment.

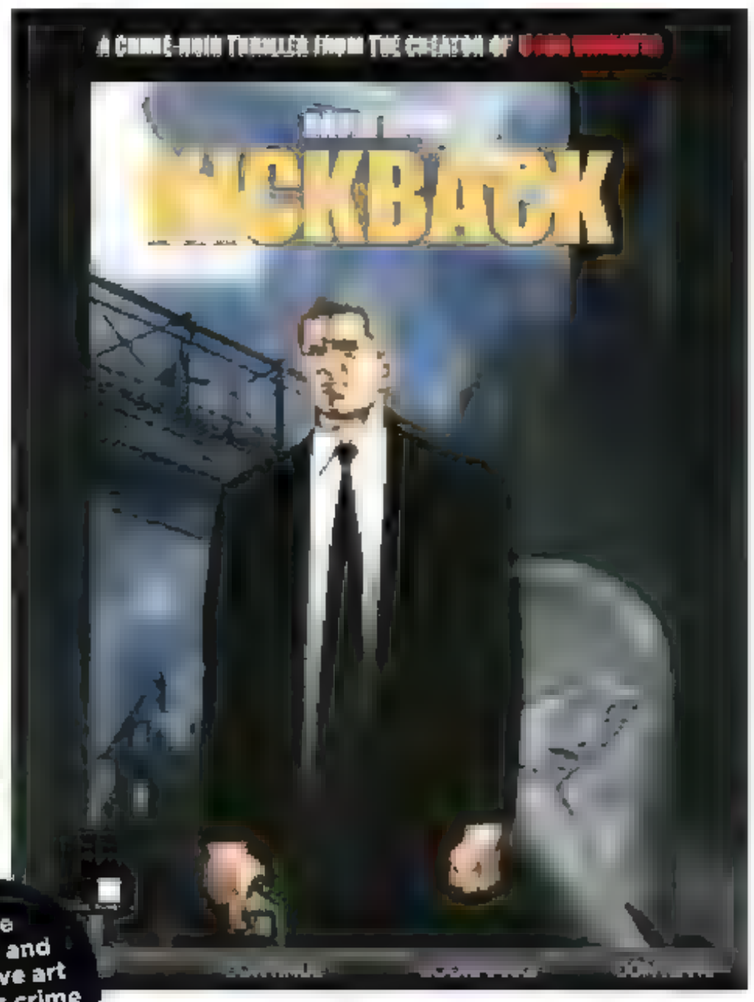
It's important for every medium to progress; otherwise people stay in the backwater of where they can be. We can produce anything, we can tell stories about anything you can imagine, but creators are often hampered by the perception of the medium.

Of course, there's also an element of nostalgia. Many people have a deep-seated affection for the name 'comics' which is very hard to break down, so they resist the change. Thankfully, the term graphic novel has slipped in under the radar. Everyone accepts it now.

CH: This brings us to your latest endeavour, the online title *Aces Weekly*...

DL: What I'm doing with *Aces Weekly* is producing an online comic art anthology of the type you used to get in print. With all the production, distribution and retail costs involved, those weekly anthology titles – the comics that a lot of us grew up with – have become financially impossible to do in the traditional way.

But you can do it online because you can go directly from the creator to the buyer. With *Aces Weekly* I have a great bunch of writers and artists together [these include Herb Trimpe, John McCrea, Phil Hester, Kyle Baker and Lloyd himself, who contributes a noir-thriller] who have the freedom to do whatever they want. And this freedom is



More moody and evocative art in Lloyd's crime thriller *Kickback*.

We should all try and ditch the term 'comics' and start using 'sequential art' instead

producing fantastic stuff. You access it from the website; press a button and it comes directly to you every week. Because of this method, we can offer great comics at a great price. The cost in the UK is £6.99 for 210 pages of all-new material.

Because we're digital, we have no borders and can go to readers worldwide. It's all high resolution, perfect for iPads or laptops. We have no printing problems, the colours you see are exactly the colours chosen by the artist – it's perfect!

It's an awful lot of work for me personally, but if you don't do something new, you're just treading water. Where the hell are you?

CH: **As well as *Aces Weekly*, you're also currently involved with a resource website called Cartoon Classroom. You're a busy man these days, it seems!**

DL: Because of the responsibilities I have for *Aces Weekly* I've had to take a step back from that, unfortunately, but the brains behind it is Steve Marchant, who does a fantastic job teaching comics to kids in schools.

Cartoon Classroom is a website that aims to centralise all the information available on where you can go to study comics and cartoon art. It covers everything, from available tutors to colleges that offer specific courses in sequential art to current exhibitions of comic art and recommended books by industry professionals. It's a fantastic resource.

CH: **Speaking of how people learn the language of comics, which artists had the biggest effect on your own work?**

DL: Oh, there's so many of them – Steve Ditko, John M Burns, Gray Morrow, Reed Crandall, Graham Ingels. I could go on and on. How can you adequately describe the influence of such great talents?

Over the years a few of these talents have produced visual icons that have become part of the human consciousness. It's very hard to achieve this powerful status, of course, and most of the ones that do – for example, the Superman 'S' emblem – are, at their core, trying to sell you something, rather than represent an ideology. I like to think that the *V* mask is something a little bit different.

You can check out David's latest work, along with that of many other creators, at ***acesweekly.co.uk****; it's well worth exploring the resources of* ***cartoonclassroom.co.uk*** *too.*

PRISONER OF DREAMS

Few have experimented as fiendishly with comics as Marc-Antoine Mathieu in his riveting Kafkaesqe nightmares. By Paul Gravett

Somehow Marc-Antoine Mathieu was fated to become a comics artist. As he explains to fellow artist Étienne Davodeau in Davodeau's autobiographical graphic novel *The Initiates* (NBM Publishing, 2013), "I was born into a family without television. That was my parents' choice. But books were everywhere, and images were a family thing. My brothers draw too."

His parents also rarely took their children to the cinema Instead, the whole family enjoyed reading – and that included comics or bandes dessinées. Rather timid and withdrawn, the youngest of four sons was initiated by his father and three brothers from the age of five into making comics of his own and it was natural for Mathieu to study art

"In 1979 I started at the Fine Arts School in Angers," he says, "where I met, among others, Pascal Rabaté" (Rabaté, of course, would become one of the most brilliant French graphic novelists of his generation.) "It was a great time, when we practised all manner of artistic disciplines. Except one. Guess which?"

Comics might not have been on the curriculum, but his explorations of other arts would feed back into his favourite medium. Fascinated by the play of light and shadow on his sculptures during his three final years of studies, he brought an extreme, Expressionist contrast to his black-and-white drawing when he graduated and resumed his comics-making. The shift from 3D sculpture to 2D comics also helped him see the medium differently, conceptually, and start wondering about its peculiar properties and little-used capacities What if the illusion of depth in comics was not the *only* illusion?

NOWHERE MAN

Parallel to getting his first short strips published, Mathieu set up a creative studio, Lucie Lom, in 1985 with his friend Philippe Leduc. It soon built a reputation for innovative design – for example, on the exhibition God Save The Comics!, the largest survey of original British comics art mounted so far, which launched the new National Centre of Comics & Image at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France in 1990 Switching ever since between the social collaborations of Lucie Lom and the solitude of making comics, Mathieu has found, "in my two careers, a way to explore the power and magic of the image."

That same year, Mathieu's own comics broke through spectacularly, thanks to his brain-scrambling graphic novel *L'Origine* ('*The Origin*', 1990), winner of the debut album of the year and the first of what would become *Julius Corentin Acquesfacques: Prisoner Of Dreams*, a sporadic series of six albums in 23 years. One of the many diligent clerks in the dour, bureaucratic Ministry of Humour, Acquesfacqes is baffled to receive previous pages torn out from the very album we are reading recounting his exploits. Amid mounting paranoia, he realises he is not leading his own life. His whole existence is being published on a printing press and written and drawn in another, higher dimension, as the readers know by Mathieu himself

When our puzzled hero looks up the title 'Origin' in his world's dictionary, the word is missing. He cannot have an origin because he was never born, he was never a child – he is a creation, a character in a comic. "If one day I have to draw his belly, you'll see he doesn't have a navel. He only comes from me."

This also explains why there are neither women in this two-dimensional storyworld, "nor trees, nor anything embodying the real world. My characters are concepts. They must accept their status of ink and paper I distance myself from reality. I play with story-telling »

Opposite page:
The Museum Vaults Excerpts From The Journal Of An Expert
An art assessor explores an ever deepen ng succession of basement leve s

codes, I recreate the world of my dreams... of which I'm the master."

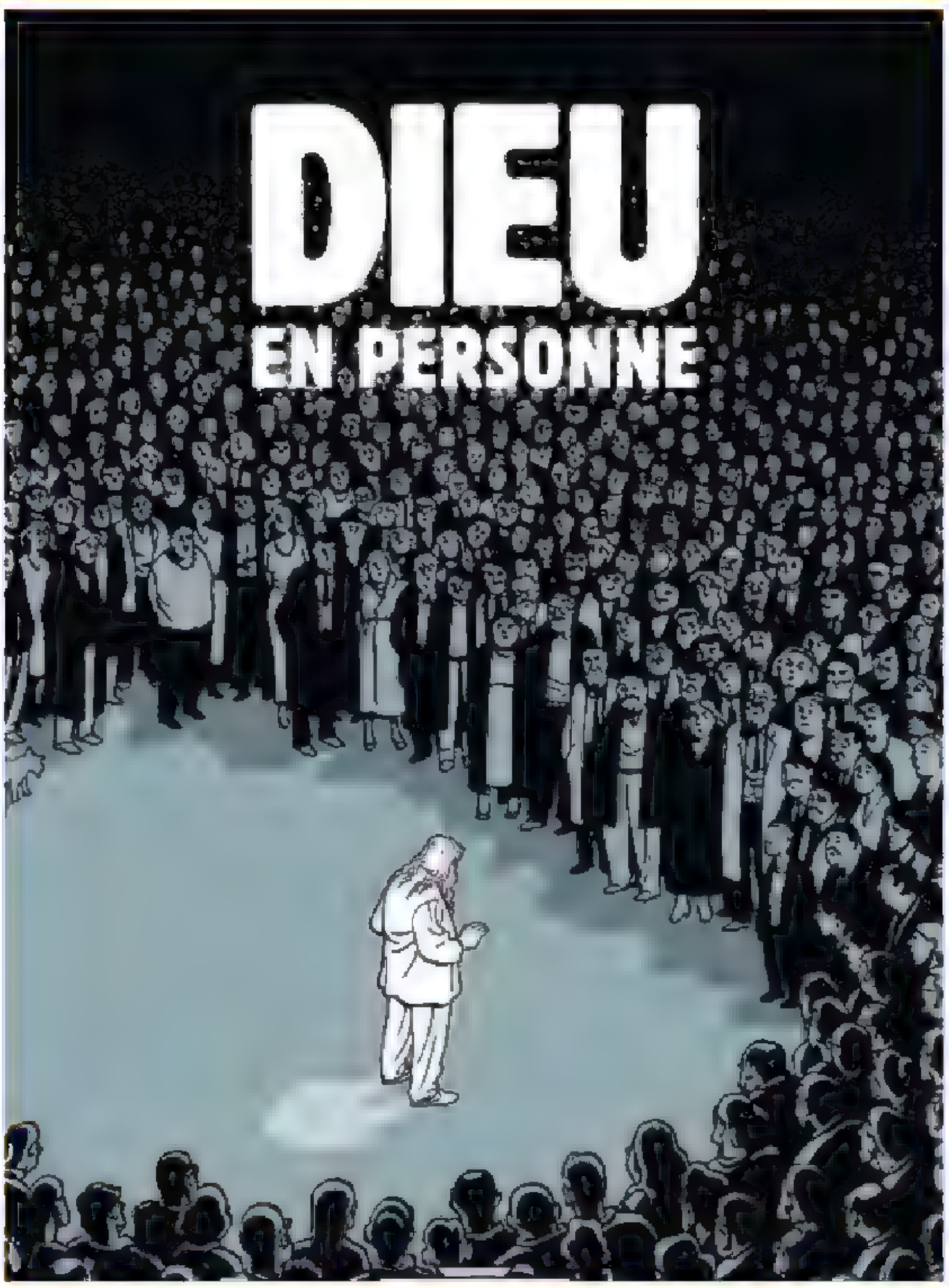
In a further twist, Mathieu disrupts time and sequence by cutting out one central panel on pages 37 and 38 of *The Origin*, leaving a blank space for us and the character to see ahead to the equivalent panel on page 39, and then on page 38 back to the previous panel on page 36 Then in one closing twist, on page 42, supposedly the last page, we see Acquesfacques receive the impossible, the following page 43, a page from his immediate future, which is being set on fire and threatens to incinerate these hapless characters and their universe.

LOOPER

And it gets stranger. In *La Qu...* (or '*The Wh...*'), Acquesfacques falls from his bed and wakes up from what was presumably a dream, only to find himself soon imprisoned in yet another dream, awakening to another and then another dream-within-a-dream.

Along the way, he gains access to dimensions from which he is normally excluded, whether dropping into the photographed studio of Mathieu himself at his drawing board, burning page 42 from the previous album, or finally discovering the mysterious 'Qu...', namely 'Quadrichromie' or four-colour reproduction, a weird notion totally alien to an inhabitant of an entirely black-and-white world. Bizarrely, for a character conscious of being a manipulated creation, Acquesfacques is our omniscient first-person narrator recounting in flashback escapades he could only have experienced as vivid, lucid dreams. Logic does not have to apply in these realms of ideas, or alternative planes of existence, where things are seldom what they seem and hardly anything can be taken for granted.

In the puzzling time-loop *Le Processus* ('*The Process*', 1993), Acquesfacques wakes up once more and gets dressed, only to find a doppelganger of himself from moments before, still asleep in his bed. After each double chases the other, our narrator finds himself back in his cramped, box-like apartment – but its ceiling is gone. Climbing up to the opening, he discovers his home is one of countless boxes in an endless grid, like an infinite, three-dimensional comics page. He realises all the previous panels he has lived through are physically still there, so he can re-enter this story by retracing his steps along the dividing walls which form the gaps between the frames Mathieu tops this by introducing the pop-up book engineering of a paper spiral which uncoils as you open the page to represent our 2D hero's close encounter with our 3D universe

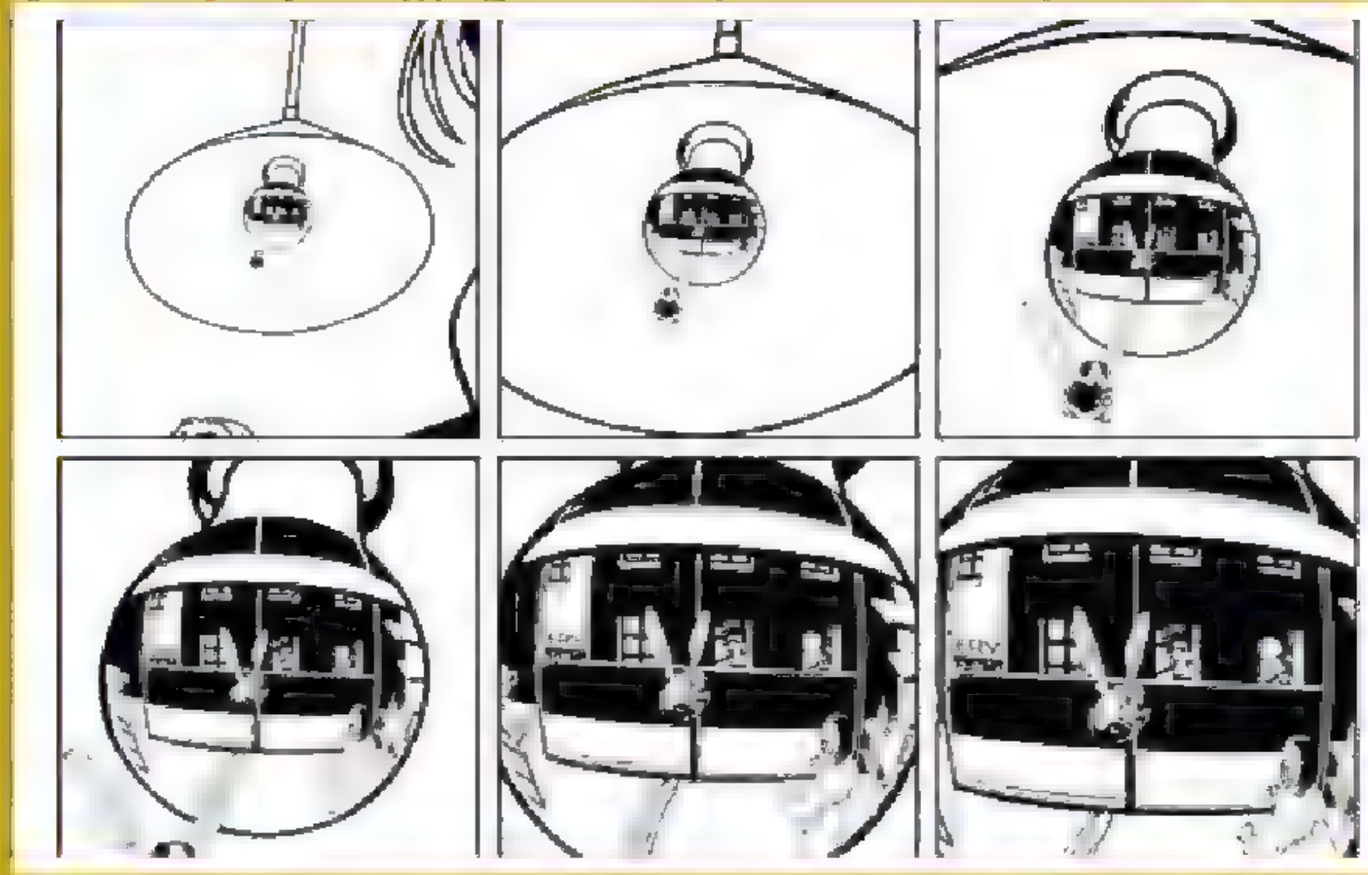


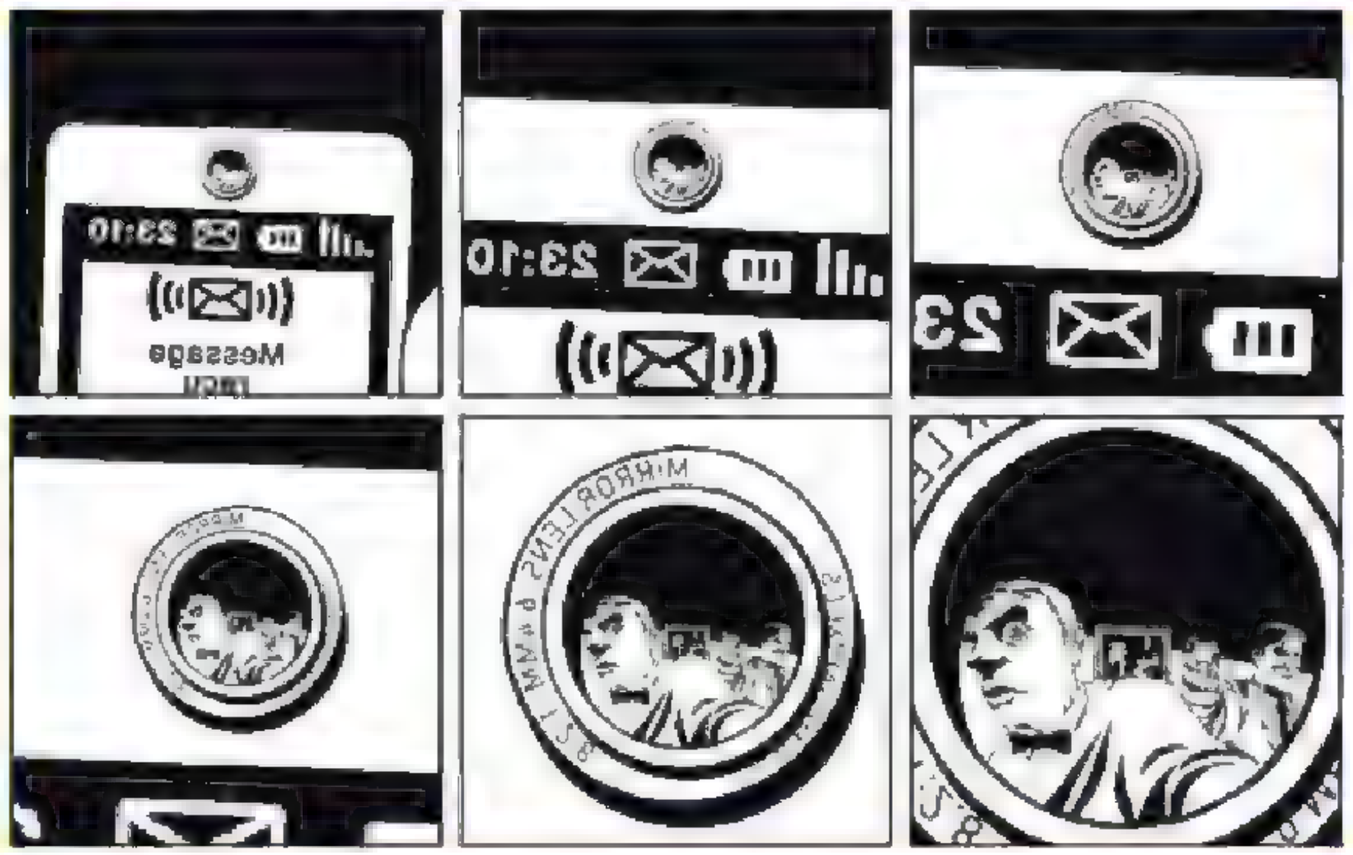
Above: *Dieu En Personne* ('*God In Person*') and right Mathieu's mind bending *Julius Corentin Acquesfacques*.

To date, Mathieu's fiendish experimentation shows no sign of flagging He devises a reversible palindrome comic in *L'Épaisseur du Miroir* ('*The Thickness Of The Mirror*', 1995), readable in both directions, while in his latest, *Le Décalage* ('*The Slippage*', 2013), he shifts the whole album, its pages and printing, out of position, putting the front cover part-way through the book so that story pages appear on the covers and endpapers – and then deliberately tears out six pages. Acquesfacques is missing and his supporting cast wander through a narrative dessert in search of him.

THE MIRROR CRACK'D

Of course, that *Truman Show* revelation when a character becomes self-aware has occurred elsewhere in comics, from Winsor McCay's classic serial dreamer *Little Nemo In Slumberland* a century ago to Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* or Alan Moore's *Supreme*, but no one would





> **Mathieu's fiendish experimentation shows no sign of flagging**

Above: Mathieu's boundary-breaking *3"*, available in English in both graphic novel and online digital formats

take the concept as far out as Mathieu. It fits completely that Acquesfacques is a French version of 'Akfak', or Kafka backwards. The metafictional labyrinths of Jorge Luis Borges, the existential humour of Samuel Beckett, the surreal visions of Escher and Magritte, and the altered states of Tim Burton and David Lynch are also never far away.

It's a crime that so far none of these brain-boggling spectaculars have been translated. Luckily, three of Mathieu's other standalone graphic novels are in English. *Dead Memory* from Dark Horse (2004), initially intended as another Acquesfacques episode, is an allegorical warning about one maverick uncovering a totalitarian bureaucracy in which the population of an overcrowded, expansive city have become interchangeable cells in a computer-controlled nervous system.

In *The Museum Vaults* from NBM (2008), a special commission from The Louvre, Mathieu imagines an assessor hired to value the Paris museum's enormous collections and spending his whole life exploring deeper and deeper through endless, bottomless basements.

Jonathan Cape has released *3"* (say '*Three Seconds*'), perhaps his wildest one-shot yet, in both graphic novel and online digital formats "I'd had the idea of using zooms for ages," he says, "but film or animation were too restrictive. Then new technology, particularly touchscreens, made it possible. Unusually, with no precise story in mind, I launched into it to find out what can we do with drawing on these new platforms."

3" lets us look out from a single particle of light travelling 900,000km in just three dizzying seconds, as it bounces back and forth between 33 reflective surfaces, from an eyeball out to a satellite in space, from pitch black to the white-light reverb of two mirrors facing each other.

Vertiginous zooms have long been one of Mathieu's regular tropes, but here he harnesses today's computer wizardry to convey never-ending, fractal-like clarity at high velocity. Within his uniform square, nine-panel grids, he also plants all the clues to a murder mystery involving a key witness in a football match-fixing exposé The whole book is soundless, except for the tiny exclamation of a fly, but a mirror will come in handy to read some of the texts in reverse. By slowing down time, the printed book and the navigable animated website enable you to examine every detail and solve this uncanny visual puzzle.

Mathieu's graphic novels do more than play with gimmicks, they insinuate and unsettle us into questioning our assumptions, our received ideas. Reading them, we can't help wondering how much we are truly in control of our lives – and what forces might secretly be pulling our strings

3" is available from Jonathan Cape from 22 August; go to www.3secondmystery.com or www.randomhouse.co.uk

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

CELEBRATE 50 YEARS

Limited Edition 5-inch Doctor and Classic Dalek action figure collection

5TH DOCTOR
1981 - 1984

THE FIFTH DOCTOR
with DALEK (Resurrection of the Daleks)

7TH DOCTOR
1987 - 1996

THE SEVENTH DOCTOR
with DALEK (Remembrance of the Daleks)

9TH DOCTOR
2005

THE NINTH DOCTOR
with DALEK (The Parting of the Ways)

3 new packs available from August

Eleven packs to collect

Start your collection today

Available now ..
The Second Doctor with Dalek (Evil of the Daleks), The Fifth Doctor with Dalek (Resurrection of the Daleks), The Sixth Doctor with Dalek (Revelation of the Daleks), The Seventh Doctor with Dalek (Remembrance of the Daleks, The Ninth Doctor with Dalek (Parting of the Ways), The Tenth Doctor with Dalek (The Stolen Earth)

Coming soon ...
The First Doctor with Dalek (The Dead Planet), The Third Doctor with Dalek (Planet of the Daleks), The Fourth Doctor with Dalek (Destiny of the Daleks), The Eight Doctor with (Children of the Revolution), The Eleventh Doctor with Dalek (Asylum of the Daleks).

50 YEARS

BBC

BBC, DOCTOR WHO (word marks, logos and devices), TARDIS, DALEKS, CYBERMAN and K-9 (word marks and devices) are trade marks of the British Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence.

BBC logo © BBC 1996. Doctor Who logo © BBC 2005. Dalek image © BBC/Terry Nation 1963/Cyberman image © BBC/Kit Pedler/Gerry Davis 1966/K-9 image © BBC/Bob Baker/Dave Martin 1977. Licensed by BBC Worldwide.

Exclusively at Toys R Us

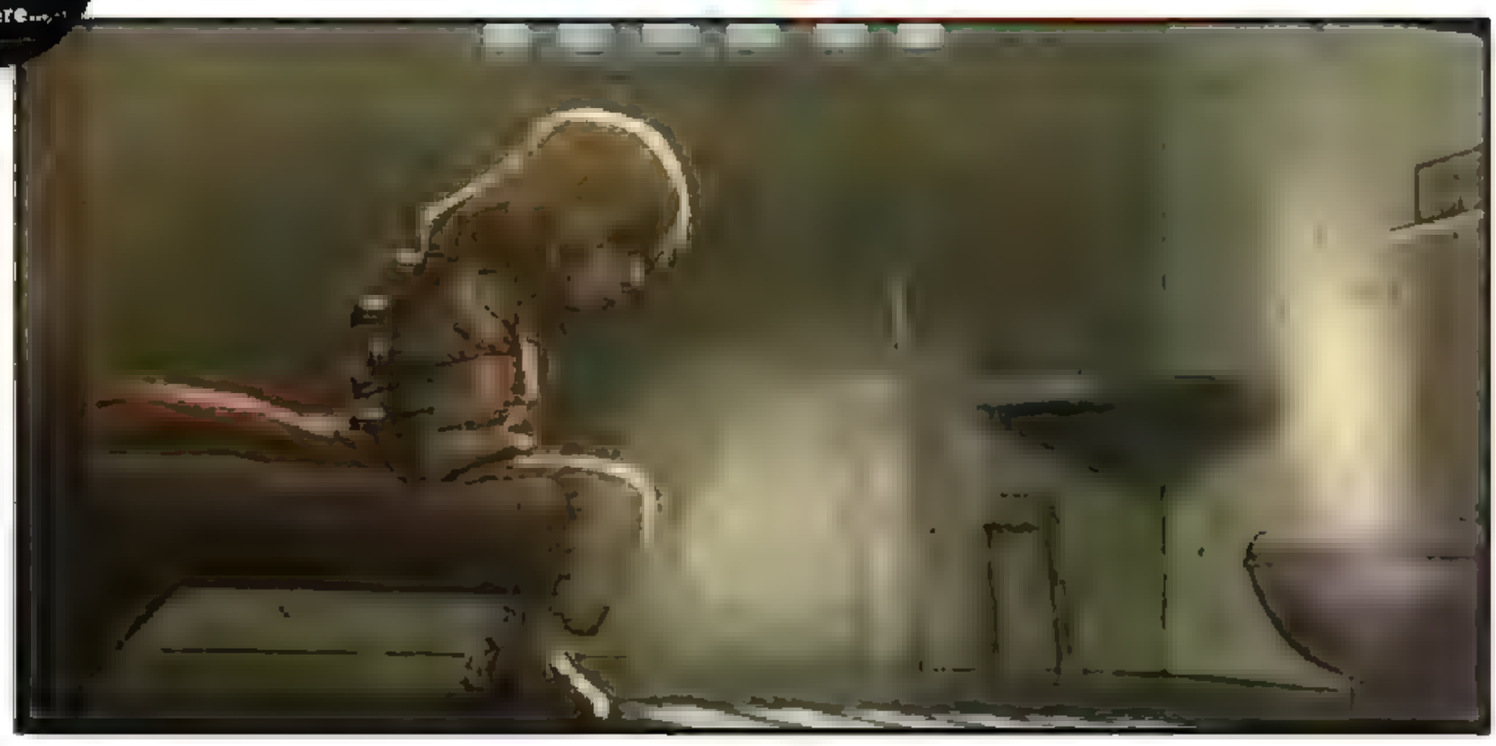
For more information and availability visit
www.toysrus.co.uk

CHARACTER

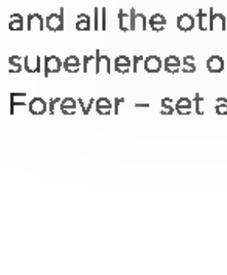
KICK-ASS 3

The story draws to a close, and it's hard to see things ending well for Dave Lizewski...

Prison's no place for Hit-Girl! She needs a team to bust her out of there...



WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTIST: John Romita Jr
PUBLISHER: Icon/Marvel/Millarworld
OUT: Now
★★★★



Mark Millar has called *Kick-Ass* one of his most personal series – it's "very autobiographical", he says, reflecting on a time in his mid-teens when, hyped up on Frank Miller comics, he and his best friends actually considered trying to become "superheroes like Batman" for a while – and is, at times, his most grubbily charming. It's also potty-mouthed, morally dubious and hyper-violent, of course, but as *Kick Ass 3* – the final chapter of Dave Lizewski's adventures as a wetsuit-clad wannabe superhero – kicks off, it's the fun that's in the ascendance, however briefly.

Indeed, though there are a few guns waved around, nobody gets as much as a Chinese burn in the opening issue of *Kick-Ass 3*. Hell-on-wheels mini-assassin Hit-Girl is in jail, and Dave, his buddies Marty and Todd – and all the other non-powered, real-life superheroes on their ragtag team, Justice Forever – set about breaking her out.

Needless to say, it doesn't go well. Despite following Hit-Girl's own meticulously prepared plan for how to do it, they're scared off by a bloke and his guard dog – "did you see the size of that guy back there?" one of them whimpers – and we're back where we started at the opening of the original *Kick-Ass* series, with hopeless nerds dressing as comic book characters and attempting to fight out-of-their-league real-life criminals who laugh at them, then beat them up – or kill them.

As ever with Millar, *Kick-Ass 3* is loaded with sharp lines – "So first you won't fuck groupies and now you won't fuck MILFs. I hate to point it out, dude, but you're getting a little weird" – and memorable sequences.

A slob superhero parks his arse in the secret HQ and won't move out; a burglar villain turns out to be a sad case who sleeps in his own vomit; and Dave psyches himself up by posing at his parents' graves in a long coat like Bruce Wayne. "Standing here... I realise that it's my destiny to wear the mask on Mondays, Thursdays and every other Sunday."

It's good to have the guys back, in other words; carnage is doubtless on its way, and it's hard to see many of our heroes coming out of this unscathed, but *Kick-Ass* has carved out a singular, highly successful place for itself on the comic book landscape, and the world will be slightly less exciting when it's gone. **Matt Bielby**

NEW COMICS REVIEWED, RATED, AND ARGUED OVER – SOMETIMES ENDLESSLY

Gods and trolls!

Our ratings explained, vicious Thor villain-style...

THE DESTROYER	★★★★★
MANGOG	★★★★
ULIK	★★★
THE EXECUTIONER	★★
MAN-BEAST	★

This Issue's Highlights

92 Titan Round-Up
94 Marvel Round-Up
96 DC Round-Up
98 Image Round-Up
100 Dark Horse Round-Up

Katz's epic, the stunning *The First Kingdom*.

TITAN ROUND-UP

Britain has a brand new comic book publisher – fresh new sister firm to the famous book publisher – and it's serious about it too...

LENORE
WRITER/ARTIST: Roman Dirge
OUT: Now
★★★★

CHRONOS COMMANDOS: DAWN PATROL
WRITER/ARTIST: Stuart Jennett
OUT: Now
★★★

IT CAME!
WRITER/ARTIST: Dan Boultwood
OUT: Now
★★★

DEATH SENTENCE
WRITER: Monty Nero
ARTIST: Mike Dowling
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE FIRST KINGDOM
WRITER/ARTIST: Jack Katz
OUT: Now
★★★★

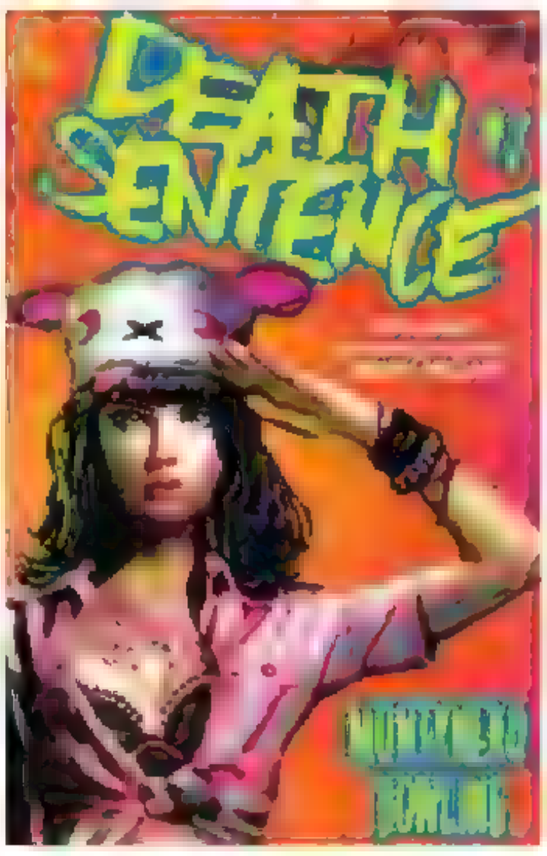
From Titan Comics comes a comic line comprising graphic novels and ongoing floppies both. It's a bold, impressive move, and it's started with a bang. Titan isn't just offering one or two books, most of them running late – as we've seen from other start-ups in the past – but dozens of them, all designed to hit a wide range of outlets on time and in numbers

Yes, some of the material may be familiar – John Higgins' *Razorjack* was last collected, by original publisher Com.X, in 2009; *Numbercruncher* appeared in the *Judge Dredd Megazine* a couple of years back; and there are old troopers like *Tank Girl* and Roman Dirge's *Lenore* too – but most of it will not be, and the list of creators ranges from familiar names (Alan Martin, Si Spurrier, Carl Critchlow) to a raft of brand new talent

Most immediately impressive of the new floppies is *Death Sentence* by Monty Nero and Mike Dowling, newish creators who've only really done odds and sods for the likes of *2000 AD* and *CLiNT* before.

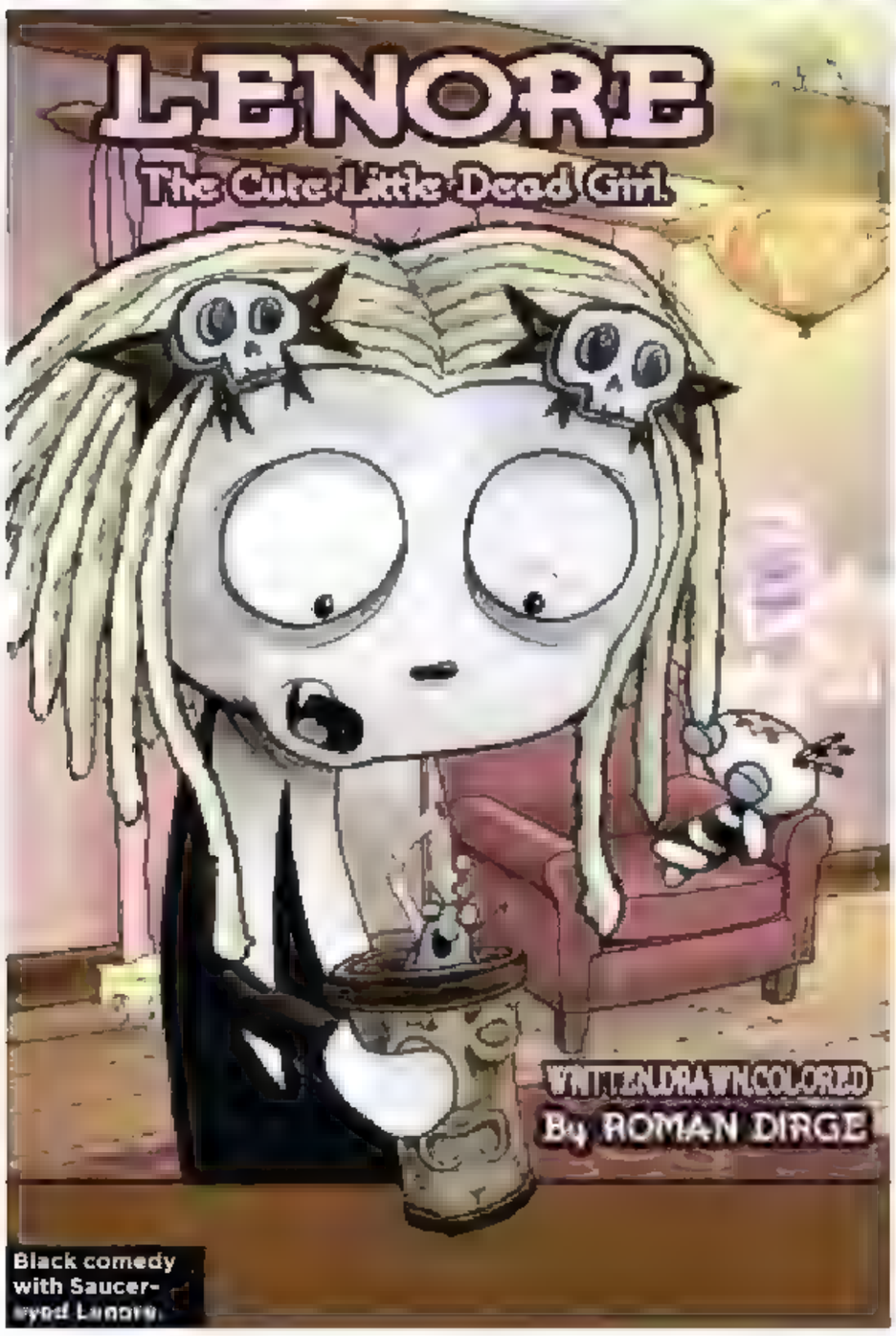
It's modern Britain, and a new sexually transmitted virus gives unpredictable superpowers for six months – then kills you. There's no explanation for where the thing came from, how prevalent it is in the population, or why groupies and the like are so happy to have sex with those infected, precautions or not – but that'll no doubt come. Instead we get an action sequence or two, and three clearly defined London hipsters all suddenly found to be G+ Positive (a Russell Brand-like comedian, a struggling angst-rocker, and a pretty young artist) and coping with it, and the attentions it brings, in different ways

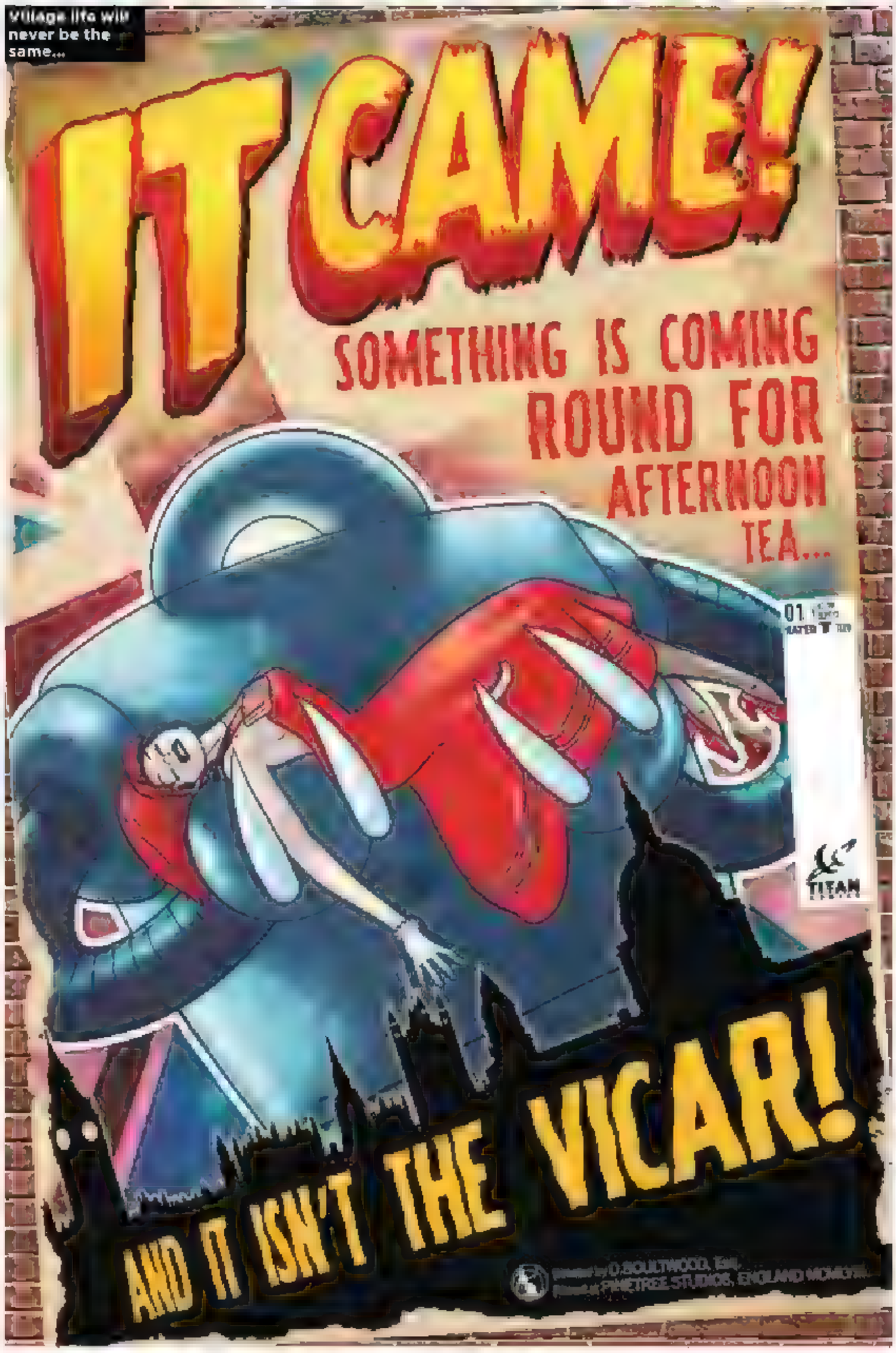
Quite violent, inventively sweary, surprisingly lyrical at times, and drawn in a confident, gritty style that's a bit Duncan Fegredo and a lot Sean Phillips, *Death Sentence* is a little bundle of energy – and likely to become many people's new favourite comic.



DEATH AND GLORY

Also great fun is *Chronos Commandos*, crossing *Sgt Fury And His Howling Commandos* with *Flesh* in a fast-moving tale of





rival World War 2 GIs and Nazis, bouncing back and forth to a dinosaur-strewn past in primitive time machines Soldiers get chomped, log bridges get raced across *King Kong*-style and people say stuff like "What the--?!", "Not much time..." and even (yes!) "Gott Im Himmel!!!" in between grenade blasts and machine-gun fire

Written and painted by Stuart Jennett, who's mostly worked as a games industry concept artist, in a colourful, blocky Ken Steacy-meets-Dermot Power style, it's a minor hoot, as is '50s B-movie pastiche *It Came!* by Dan Boultwood, another light-hearted action-romp, this one told in blue-grey tones and almost exclusively long, thin movie screen-shaped panels. A giant alien robot stalks the bucolic English countryside, and it's up to a tweedy prof and his pretty assistant – an English Reed and Sue before their fateful rocket flight – to get to the bottom of things.

Boultwood uses an expressive cartoony style, clearly loves drawing Morris Minors, pubs and pipes as much as he does bulbous 'bots, and litters the comic with fake period ads for cigs and hair tonic; the result doesn't feel all that essential, but it's a hoot to read

Very different in tone is *Lenore: The Cute Little Dead Girl*, Roman Dirge's strip – named for the Edgar Allan Poe poem – that's run on-and-off since the early '90s, and which Titan Magazines picked up in 2009; from #8 on it'll be published by Titan Comics

Lenore is a naughty, playful, essentially kind-hearted undead 10-year-old who's been haunting a mansion with her creepy friends – Pooty, who has a bucket for a head and carries a trident, and rag doll Ragamuffin are the main ones in #8 – for the past 100 years. Full of macabre humour – much of the plot revolves around the gang trying to pry a splinter out of Pooty's rectum – it's funny, engaging stuff.

More modern than Wednesday Adams, harder edged than Emily the Strange, it's Tim Burton doing Beavis and Butt-head – and in a good way. The scrappy-looking art and apparent teen goth core demographic may put some off, but I'd be very surprised if you aren't much more entertained than you thought you'd be

EPIC ILLUSTRATED

Many of the other Titan Comics we've seen so far are reprints of some type or other, but one deserves special mention: Jack Katz's *The First Kingdom* series, a minor mainstream comic artist's '70s independent epic, eventually comprising almost 800 highly detailed, hyper-intense pages detailing the future history of Earth, and now being collected by Titan in six remastered volumes.

The First Kingdom heaves with nudity and violence, has a vast cast of men, gods and monsters, and moves from a post-nuclear pre-historic era into space opera halfway through. It can be an intimidating read, with little dialogue and far too much caption text by modern standards, and the pages rammed with panels and detailed imagery – the lack of gutters can give it an airless feel – but stick with it. The panels get larger as the story progresses, a shift from pen to brush smooths out Katz's line, and our hero, Tundran, starts to dominate. Mankind's doomed to repeat cycles of hard struggle from primitive society towards an unsustainable technological utopia which contains within it the seeds of inevitable collapse, Katz seems to be saying Unless we flip the script.

You can see *The First Kingdom* develop by leaps and bounds in this first volume; if Titan Comics, after this strong start, can do the same, we'll have quite some publisher on our hands. A British Dark Horse, anyone? **Matt Bielby**

"Most immediately impressive of the new floppies is *Death Sentence*"

MARVEL ROUND-UP

These days Marvel events run from March to October, with a tiny gap in the middle, but... oh no. They've filled that too!

AVENGERS
WRITERS: Jonathan Hickman & Nick Spencer
ARTIST: Stefano Caselli
OUT: Now
★★★★

NEW AVENGERS
WRITER: Jonathan Hickman
ARTIST: Mike Deodato
OUT: Now
★★★★

AVENGERS AI
WRITER: Sam Humphries
ARTIST: André Lima Araújo
OUT: Now
★★★★

HUNGER
WRITER: Josh Hale Fialkov
ARTIST: Leonard Kirk
OUT: Now
★★★★

WOLVERINE
WRITER: Paul Cornell
ARTISTS: Mirco Pierfederici & Karl Kesel
OUT: Now
★★★★

DEXTER
WRITER: Jeff Lindsay
ARTIST: Dalibor Talajic
OUT: Now
★★★

Even a few years ago, blockbuster event titles were mercifully confined to the summer months. But no longer, it seems: with *Age Of Ultron* launching in early March and *Infinity* poised to stretch until the end of October, the Marvel Universe is beginning to resemble one huge, sprawling, never-ending crossover. For a while, with *Age Of Ultron* wrapping up in late June and *Infinity* debuting in early August, it seemed there were at least a few weeks in the middle there for overwhelmed fans to catch their breath But wait! Don't forget 'Prelude To Infinity', unfolding in the pages of *Avengers* and *New Avengers*.

Having swapped the bonhomie clubhouse atmosphere of Brian Michael Bendis' eight-year tenure for a labyrinthine cosmic epic focusing on a cadre of remote, godlike beings when he assumed the reins of the two flagship books around the turn of the year, Hickman's oblique, multi-layered approach brings a new flavour, one it isn't always easy to get your head around if you haven't tackled the previous instalments. Indeed, the one-page recaps in each issue are handy even for regular followers.

Focusing on the Illuminati – the secret cabal of the Marvel U's most powerful figures, including Namor, Reed Richards and Tony Stark, with Hank McCoy replacing the late Charles Xavier – *New Avengers* sets the stage for Matt Fraction's *Inhumanity* later this year as it moves between an increasingly bitter war between Wakanda and Atlantis to insidious machinations within the Inhumans. Excellently depicted by Mike Deodato's ornate artwork, Black Bolt tempts fate by engaging his treacherous brother Maximus to locate a dimension where his formidable sonic powers are nullified, thus enabling the usually mute monarch to actually speak for a change.

Meanwhile, over in *Avengers*, less prominent characters such as erstwhile New Universe stalwarts Star Brand and Nightmask – plus the revived Captain Universe and former Secret Warrior Manifold – play increasingly crucial roles as Hickman gradually reveals how the tantalising elements that he has seeded over the past eight months will finally fall into place as *Infinity* looms ever closer. In fact, with former *Secret Warriors* artist Stefano Caselli joining Hickman on the current arc, *Avengers* is beginning to resemble a timely reunion of the ex-*Fantastic Four* scribe's first Marvel assignment in 2008, indicating just how far he's progressed in the past half-decade.

“Hickman gradually reveals how the tantalising elements will fall into place”

METAL MEH

According to reports, Hank Pym will not feature in *Avengers 2*'s cinematic *Age Of Ultron* extravaganza, but he is set to become a key member of *Avengers AI*'s offbeat line-up of androids, robots, cyborgs and plain old humans. Well-worn time-travelling travails and inconsistent artwork meant *Age Of Ultron* itself fell flat at times, but its revisionist retconning has left the Marvel Universe in a promising position at least. For a motley bunch of synthetic metalheads, *Uncanny X-Force*'s Sam Humphries imbues his eccentric cast – which also includes ex-Runaway (and Ultron's

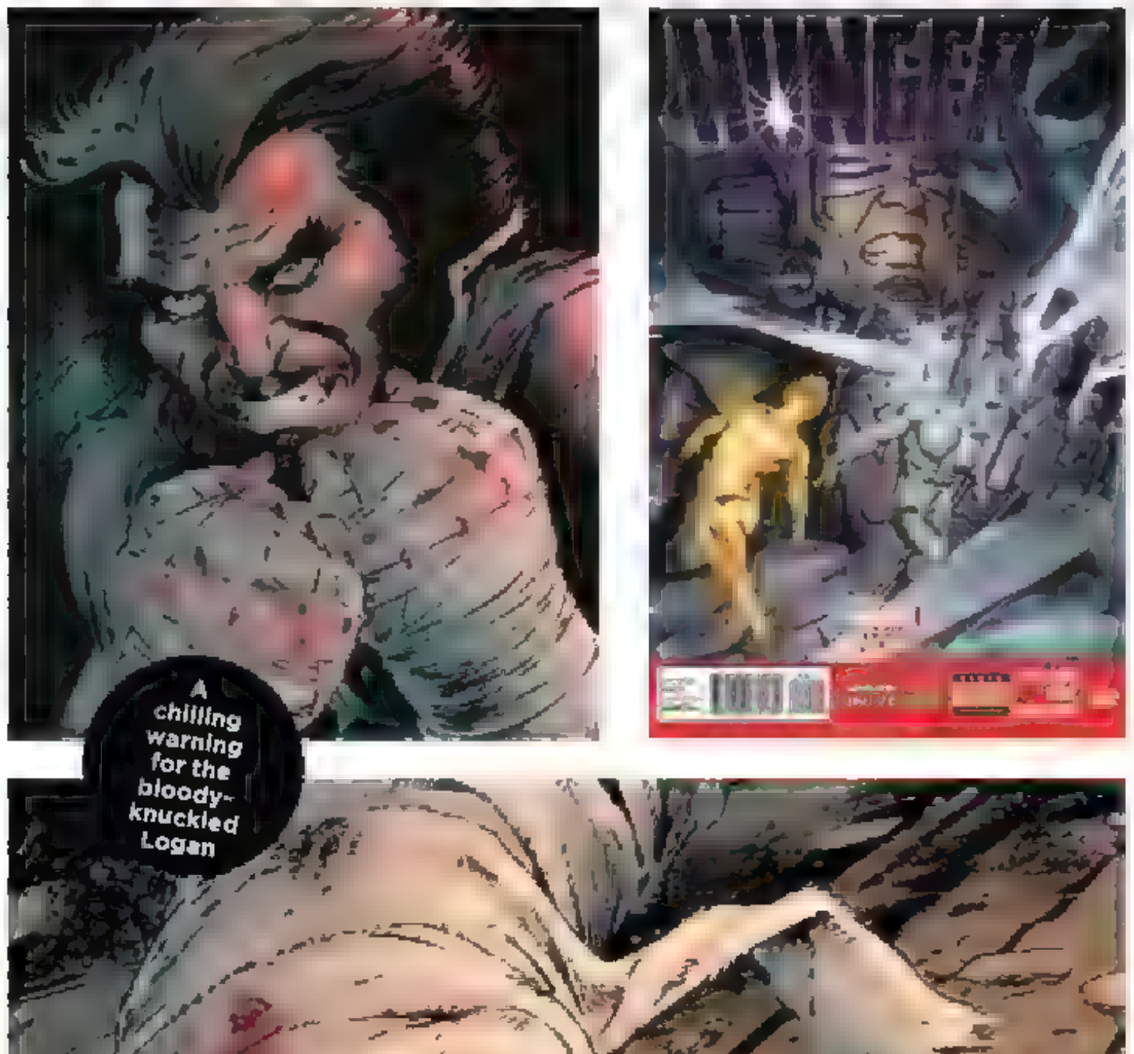
Infinity's cosmic aliens in *Avengers* #20.

kid brother) Victor Mancha and a reconfigured Doombot – with considerable zest and personality, suggesting that *Avengers AI* has plenty of legs, even if those limbs aren't made of flesh and bone.

Amongst *Age Of Ultron*'s most intriguing consequences was the main Marvel U's Galactus' defection to the Ultimate Universe. Since his abrupt departure from DC's new *Green Lantern* creative ranks before an issue was even published, Josh Hale Fialkov has concentrated on making a name for himself at the House of Ideas, first taking on *Spider-Man* offshoot miniseries *Alpha* and more recently succeeding Sam Humphries on the ever-clunkily titled *Ultimate Comics Ultimates*.

Preparing the groundwork for Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley's *Ultimate Cataclysm* in November – presumably scheduled to fill a gap after *Infinity*'s conclusion the previous month – Fialkov is in the meantime offering up a four-issue Galactus-centric miniseries called *Hunger*, which neatly contrasts the classic archetypes of the original Marvel Universe with its theoretically grittier, more realistic 21st century Ultimate version, as the old Stan Lee/Jack Kirby planet-eating villain merges with his Ultimate equivalent, a sentient swarm of ravenous nanites, to create an even more ominous entity.

Elsewhere, and taking a leaf out of *The Wolverine*'s big screen book, Logan has lost his healing factor in *Wolverine* after clashing with an infectious hive-mind. With a horde of vengeful opponents jostling to take advantage of Wolvie's apparently weakened state in the six-part 'Killable', Paul Cornell first deftly highlights the more everyday aspects of his newfound mortality, ranging from the ability to cut himself shaving to, most importantly, a deeper appreciation and intolerance of alcohol. After Alan Davis and Mark Farmer's sterling work on the new book's first four issues, Mirco Pierfederici and Karl Kesel's more average efforts on #5 to #7 can't help but pale in comparison and makes you long for the veteran *Marvelman* artist's return with #8's 'Killable' opener.



DEATH BECOMES HIM

With *Dexter*'s eighth and final season currently underway, it seems like a strange time for the loveable serial killer to make his comic book bow – and especially through Marvel, which has showed little interest in licensing others' properties in recent years. But *Dexter* is something of a success – and a welcome change.

Written by original author Jeff Lindsay, and based in the milieu of his *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* novels rather than the television series continuity, this new book's distinctively designed covers – depicting just the lower half of our favourite anti-hero's face – neatly sum up this five-parter's intrinsic problem. Quite simply, none of the likenesses here – or, indeed, some of the characters – much resemble those we're so familiar with from TV; it's particularly problematic with Dexter himself, as you can't help but hear Michael C Hall's charmingly sinister narration in your head even as you look at a very different face.

Nevertheless, there's potential in Lindsay's engaging – if unremarkable seeming – tale of Dexter's reunion with an old school adversary, who has reinvented himself as a seemingly benevolent charity chief. It seems that while it's curtains for Dexter on the box, there's a good chance he'll live on in comics for some time at least.

Stephen Jewell

It's lights out for Geoff Johns on *Green Lantern.*

Supes is back in action in *Unchained.*

DC ROUND-UP

It's the end of an era, with Geoff Johns finally bowing out of his epic run on *Green Lantern*...

GREEN LANTERN
WRITER: Geoff Johns
ARTIST: Doug Mahnke
OUT: Now
★★★★

SUPERMAN UNCHAINED
WRITER: Scott Snyder
ARTIST: Jim Lee
OUT: Now
★★★

THE WAKE
WRITER: Scott Snyder
ARTIST: Sean Murphy
OUT: Now
★★★★½

ASTRO CITY
WRITER: Kurt Busiek
ARTIST: Brent Anderson
OUT: Now
★★★★

BATMAN/SUPERMAN
WRITER: Greg Pak
ARTIST: Jae Lee
OUT: Now
★★

And so, after nearly 10 years and 100 issues, Geoff Johns bows out as primary *Green Lantern* scribe.

Green Lantern #20 is his swansong, and it's an oversized, perfect-bound monster of a comic – nearly 60 pages of story interleaved with congratulatory tributes from Johns' peers in the worlds of comics and movies. The plot manages to be both a recap of a decade's worth of storylines and an action-packed climax to the 'Wrath Of The First Lantern' multi-part crossover, while also sowing seeds for future adventures to be written by other hands.

There's no denying that Johns radically reinvigorated Hal Jordan, the Guardians of Oa and the rest, and expanded the scope of the 'Lantern universe' immensely. Under his aegis we had memorable cosmic epics such as 'The Sinestro Corps War', 'Blackest Night', 'Brightest Day', and 'The Rise Of The Third Army', and a whole spectrum of different Lanterns emerged, each colour corresponding to a different emotion. The character of Hal himself was redeemed from the indignities that had been inflicted on him beforehand (being possessed by Parallax, becoming the Spectre, and so on) and shown to be so much more than a straight-arrow cockpit jockey who just happened to have lucked into wearing a super-duper space ring.

Although Ethan Van Sciver and Ivan Reis have been Johns' main artistic collaborators over the years, Doug Mahnke has been doing sterling work on the title since 2009 and here shows his command of dramatic layouts, intimate character moments and coruscating battle scenes. In all, Johns has had a terrific run, well deserving of this deluxe farewell celebration.

TAKE THAT, STERANKO!

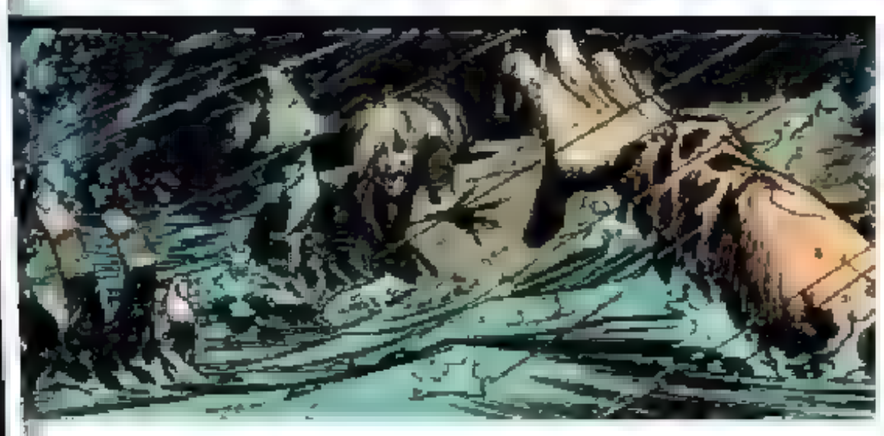
Scott Snyder, after scoring a critical and commercial hit with *Batman*, has been assigned a brand new ongoing series featuring DC's other big gun, Superman. Not only that, but DC co-publisher and mega-fan-fave artist Jim Lee is doing the pencilling. In other words, *Superman Unchained* is a huge deal, especially debuting as it does to coincide with the release of the *Man Of Steel* movie

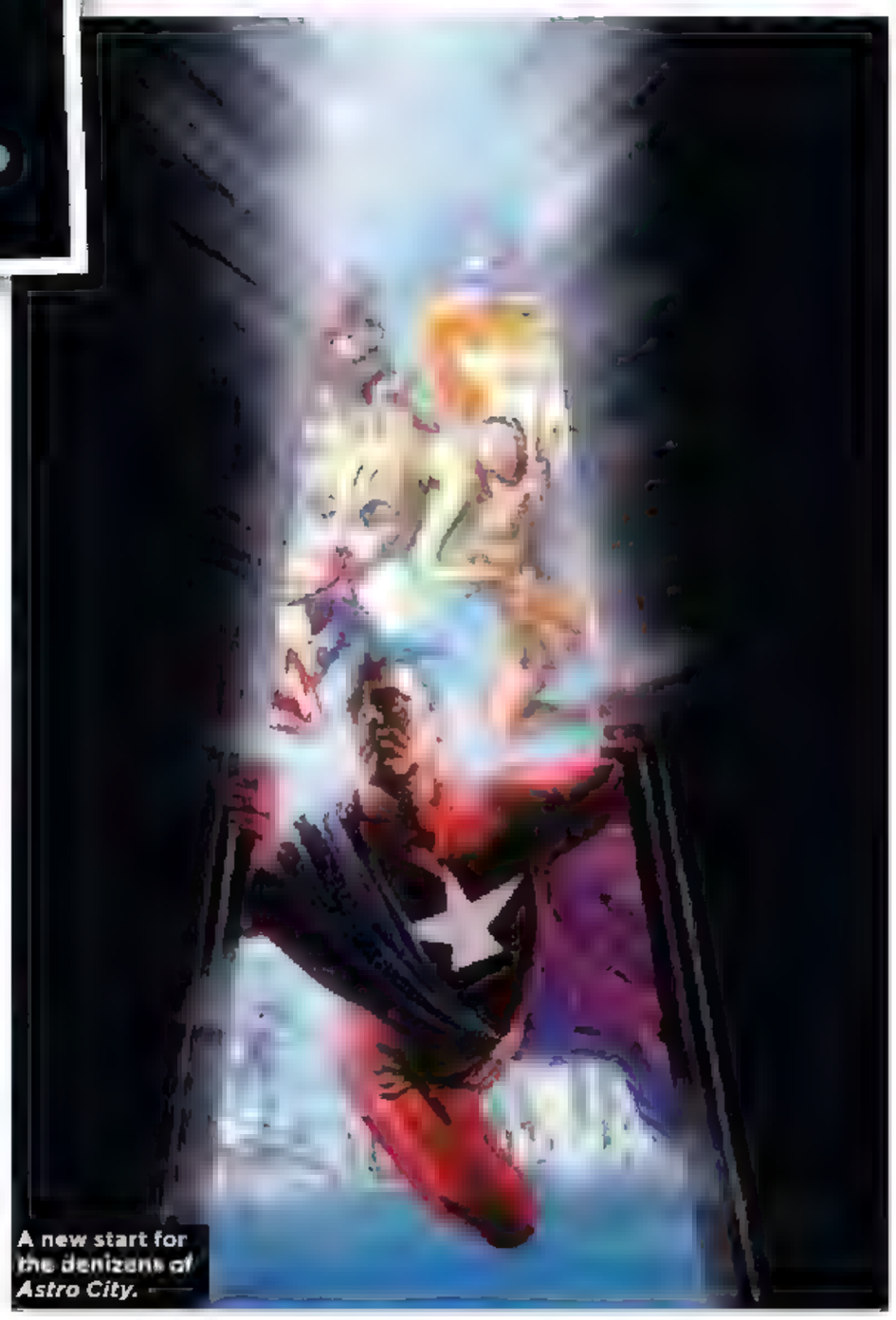
There's nothing particularly wrong with this first issue, but there's nothing spectacularly right either. Snyder hits all the right beats for a Superman tale but it doesn't quite convince, while Lee's art seems rushed The real disaster is a quadruple-size foldout page with a splash panel on either side. This is 'tipped in', ie glued to a strip of card that's stapled into the book. The trouble is, the space underneath the card strip hasn't been left free of captioning, resulting in large chunks of text being obscured. You're invited to detach the foldout and use it as a double-sided poster, but why would anyone want to do that when its loss leaves a gap in the narrative? An odd, poorly-thought-out gimmick.

Snyder also unleashes a new Vertigo 10-issue miniseries, *The Wake*, in tandem with artist Sean Murphy of *Joe The Barbarian* and

DC's big guns misfire in *Batman/Superman*.

Bad Things happen at sea in *The Wake*.




A new start for the denizens of *Astro City*.

“Johns is well-deserving of this deluxe farewell”

Punk Rock Jesus fame. This seems much more his thing: dark, moody, sinister, horrific. Dr Lee Archer is a cetologist – which, being the wise, erudite people you are, you know means whale scientist – who is recruited by the Department of Homeland Security to study a bizarre new sea beast. It's a kind of feral merman that was captured after attacking some oil riggers, and its haunting song has the Siren-like ability to disorientate and even subjugate the listener. Dr Archer and a group of other investigators are confined with the creature in a high-tech submersible a mile below the surface of the Arctic Ocean. Very soon, Bad Things start to happen.

Snyder handles the pacing and atmosphere of his story superbly, and Murphy's manga-inflected illustration evokes a genuine sense of claustrophobia and menace. But this isn't just a Michael-Crichton-style science thriller. Interstitial scenes set 200 years into the future and 5.1 million years in the past suggest a much broader scope and ambition. The merman is an evolutionary throwback who, we may infer, will have a significant impact on humankind.

ASTRO FORCE

Astro City has gone through more imprints than the Flash has gone through running shoes First Image, then Homage, then Wildstorm, and now Vertigo But it's the same creative team, including Alex Ross on covers, and it's the same wonderful fun superheroics.

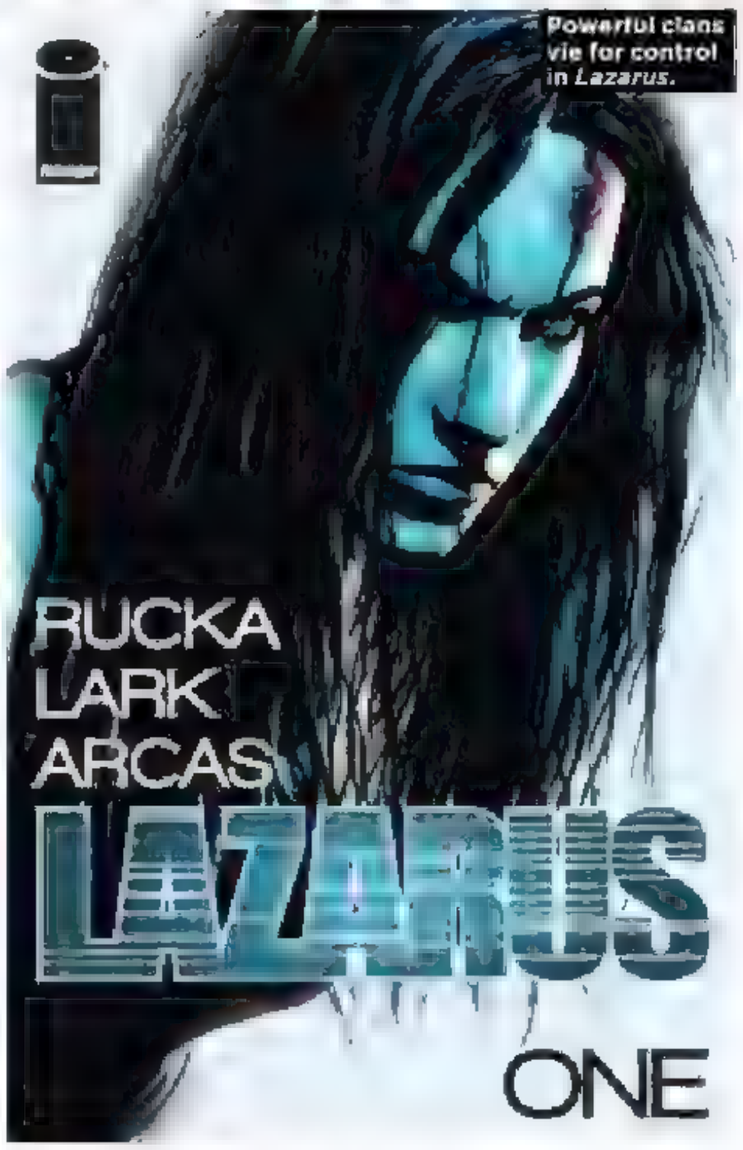
To bring new readers up to speed, Busiek introduces a narrator, the Broken Man, who breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader directly. There's also a brand new *Astro City* heroine, the anime-styled American Chibi who appears alongside stalwarts such as the Samaritan and Winged Victory. American Chibi is the first to encounter a mysterious gigantic door which manifests above the city. From this portal steps a mighty Kirbyesque figure, a fusion of Galactus, Psycho Man and a Celestial He's Telseth, an ambassador from outer space who claims he wants to make peaceful contact with the peoples of Earth.

Because this is *Astro City*, civilians feature as prominently as the spandex crowd, and so the storyline's main focus is ordinary guy Ben Pullam, a middle-aged widower with a bald spot and two grown-up daughters. He volunteers to be Telseth's human liaison and guide.

Where this plot arc is going to go next is anyone's guess. That's the beauty of *Astro City*. It's a fully-realised superhero universe with a true impression of flow and progress. Its past is fixed, so you don't have to keep up with endless revamps, reboots and retcons. Its future, by contrast, is unknown. There won't be a constantly re-established status quo Anything could happen. And will And is permanent.

Batman/Superman, on the other hand, is the same old same old. It features the two characters at the birth of their careers, sometime during the New 52's 'five years ago' moment when the capes first started crawling out of the woodwork. In issue #1 there's a Clark-meets-Bruce opening scene, followed by a possessed Catwoman on the loose in Metropolis, leading in turn to a confusing time-twisty cliffhanger climax which introduces an Apokoliptian villainess, Trickster

Jae Lee's art is the usual overwrought nonsense, all pinched, pensive faces and minimal detail His figures pose against flat backdrops as though actors on a theatre stage, and he mistakes fancy layouts for sophisticated visual storytelling Not so much World's Finest, more World's Feeblest. **James Lovegrove**



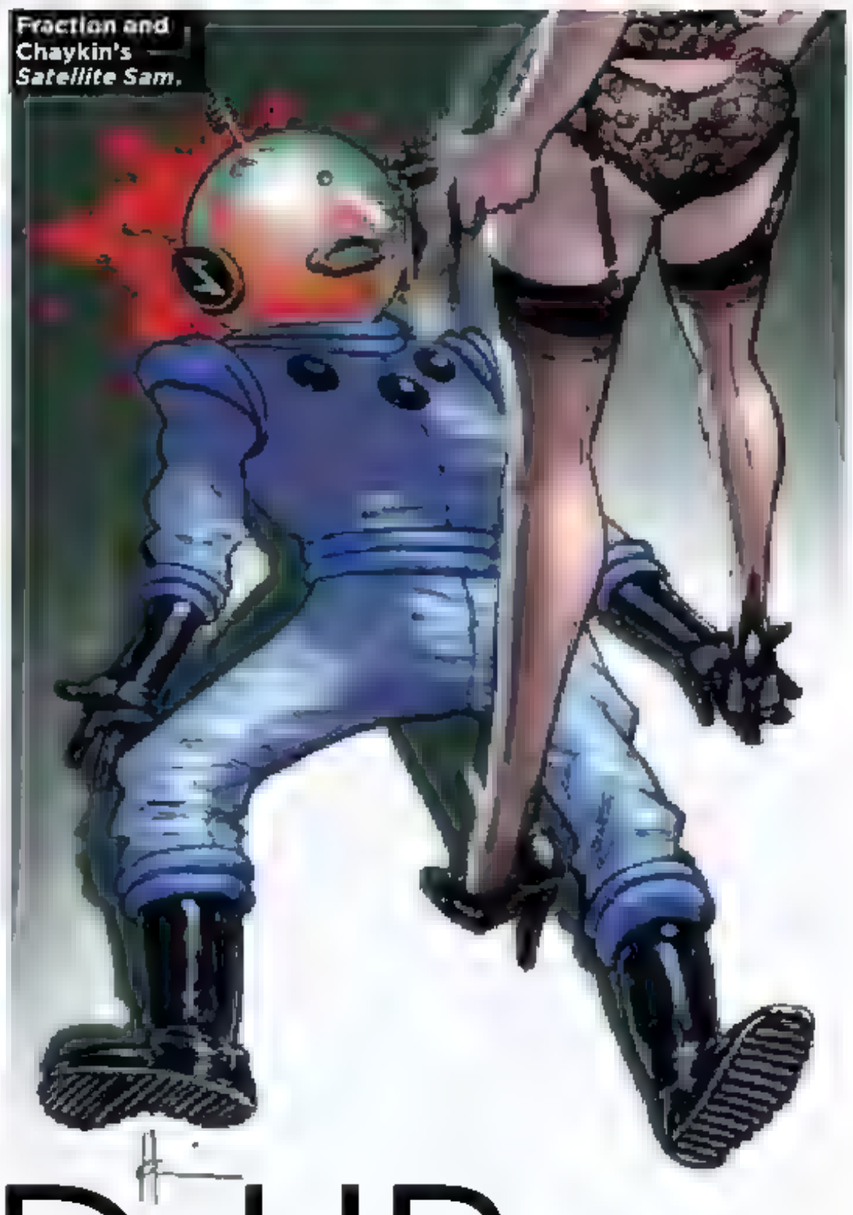


IMAGE ROUND-UP

Introducing *Lazarus*: potentially the strongest new comic series of the year...

LAZARUS
WRITER: Greg Rucka
ARTIST: Michael Lark
OUT: Now
★★★★★

GHOSTED
WRITER: Joshua Williamson
ARTIST: Goran Sudzuka
OUT: Now
★★★★

SATELLITE SAM
WRITER: Matt Fraction
ARTIST: Howard Chaykin
OUT: Now
★★★½

Image seems to put out top-notch new titles every month or so these days – it's like the HBO of comics, all of a sudden – and the current crop continues its winning run. There are no superheroes here, or anything like them: just strong concepts, world-class creators and bags of craft.

Best by far of the latest batch is *Lazarus* from Greg Rucka (*Whiteout*, *Queen & Country*) and Michael Lark of *Daredevil* and *Terminal City* fame. A smart SF crime story, making great use of current bleeding-edge thinking in stem cell research, it posits a believable near future where a tiny number of powerful industrial families act like crime syndicates-cum-feudal lords, ruling vast swathes of the planet where their servants and workers live well, and the rest of the population is effectively 'waste'.

We follow the Carlyle clan – a backstabbing bunch, led by the savvy, amoral patriarch Malcolm Carlyle – in much the same way we followed the Corleones in *The Godfather*; we may be appalled by them, but they seem the lesser evil most of the time. A war is brewing with the rival Family Morray, and right in the middle of it sits Forever Carlyle, genetically engineered daughter and warlord of the clan: part sister to her siblings, but mostly a dangerous tool, the family's sword and their shield.

Like *Saga* and *East Of West* – two of the great Image creations of recent times – this is an exciting, mystery-packed tale full of potential and intrigue; after two issues, I suddenly find myself more engaged with Forever and her fate than that of any other character in current comics. Family above all.

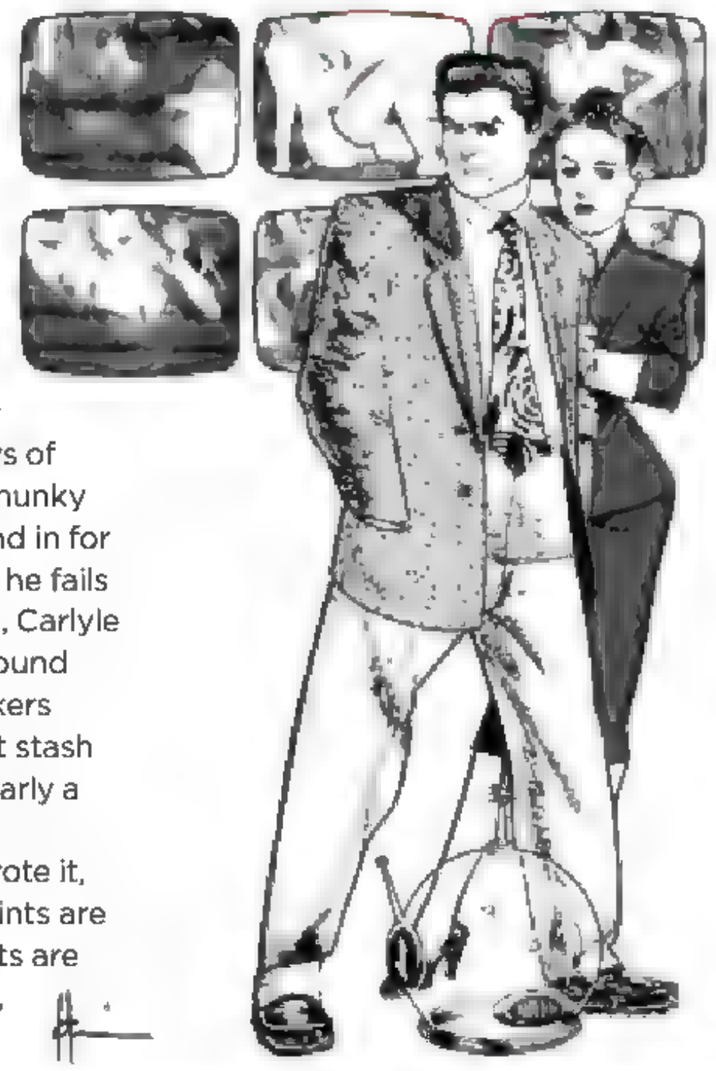
SLEEPING SATELLITE

Most conventional of the latest Image trio is *Ocean's Eleven*-meets-*Hellblazer* series *Ghosted*, produced by Robert Kirkman's Image imprint Skybound, in which a homicidal Germanic blonde called Anderson Lake breaks smirking, troubled master of the heist-gone-wrong Jackson T Winters out of a high-security prison on the orders of an occult-obsessed millionaire, Marcus Schrecken. His choice: go back to jail, or put together a new team to break into a haunted mansion before it's demolished, there to capture a real-life ghost for Schrecken's collection. But the gang he puts together seems to have agendas of its own...

A solid premise, good storytelling, snappy dialogue and an eager pace all make this a very pleasing and intriguing opener, while the clear, expressive art of Goran Sudzuka is always a minor joy.

Weakest of the three is probably the black-and-white *Satellite Sam* – a weird thing to say about a super-handsome Howard Chaykin-illustrated book with an original (for comics, at least) premise, but there you go. A murder mystery set in the early days of television, it sees the usual hunky Chaykin hero forced to stand in for his roguish actor dad when he fails to turn up on set. Of course, Carlyle White is dead, soon to be found in a room littered with knickers and dildos, and atop a giant stash of girlie photos – there's clearly a mystery here to solve.

Though Matt Fraction wrote it, it's Chaykin whose fingerprints are all over *Satellite Sam*: layouts are bold, storytelling confident, and nobody draws period costume like Howard. Think of Chaykin's own *Black Kiss* crossed with *Mad Men* or – particularly – *The Hour*, but with the sex and violence dialled right down in the mix. It's this that gives the otherwise excellent *Satellite Sam* a slightly underwhelming feel: *Black Kiss* threw us into the blood and the mystery and the shagging right away, and this one seems rather too coy about it. Again, that's a weird thing to say about a Chaykin comic. **Matt Bielby**



HARLAN ELLISON'S 7 AGAINST CHAOS

WRITER: Harlan Ellison
ARTIST: Paul Chadwick
PUBLISHER: DC
OUT: Now
★★★★

Seven Samurai in space. It's been done before Remember the 1980 Roger Corman cinematic cheesefest that was *Battle Beyond The Stars*?

SF grandmaster Harlan Ellison offers a fresh-ish take on the idea. Set in the far future, *7 Against Chaos* sees a mysterious hooded figure assemble a team of misfits and renegades from various corners of the solar system. Their mission? To save Earth, where the fabric of reality is being torn

apart. People are spontaneously combusting or turning into snake-men, and pockets of bygone geological eras are popping up in the modern day, with disastrous consequences.

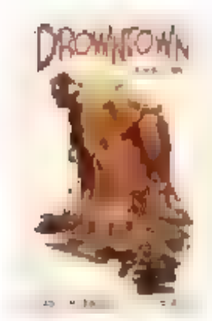
The culprit is Erisssa, a reptilian alien who is vandalising the time stream from way back in the Mid-Pleistocene, genetically manipulating our mammalian ancestors in order to reshape the world in his race's own image. Our septet of heroes slingshot into prehistory through a black hole to stop him. It seems likely not all of them will survive the confrontation.

Coming from the author of short story collections of extraordinary diversity and imagination such as *Deathbird Stories* and *Shatterday*, this is a surprisingly conventional SF adventure yarn, although the narrative captions betray Ellison's inimitable way with words. 'Frozen eyes glint in starlight', he writes, describing corpses floating in the vacuum of space. 'Hair is a sculpture in the airless void '

The real draw is an all-too-rare comics art job from *Concrete* creator Paul Chadwick, who excels in his depiction of decadent future civilisations and prehistoric beasts, and even gets to use his signature cutaway shots, revealing events underground or below the surface of water. **James Lovegrove**

DROWNTOWN

WRITER: Robbie Morrison
ARTIST: Jim Murray
PUBLISHER: Jonathan Cape
OUT: Now
★★★★

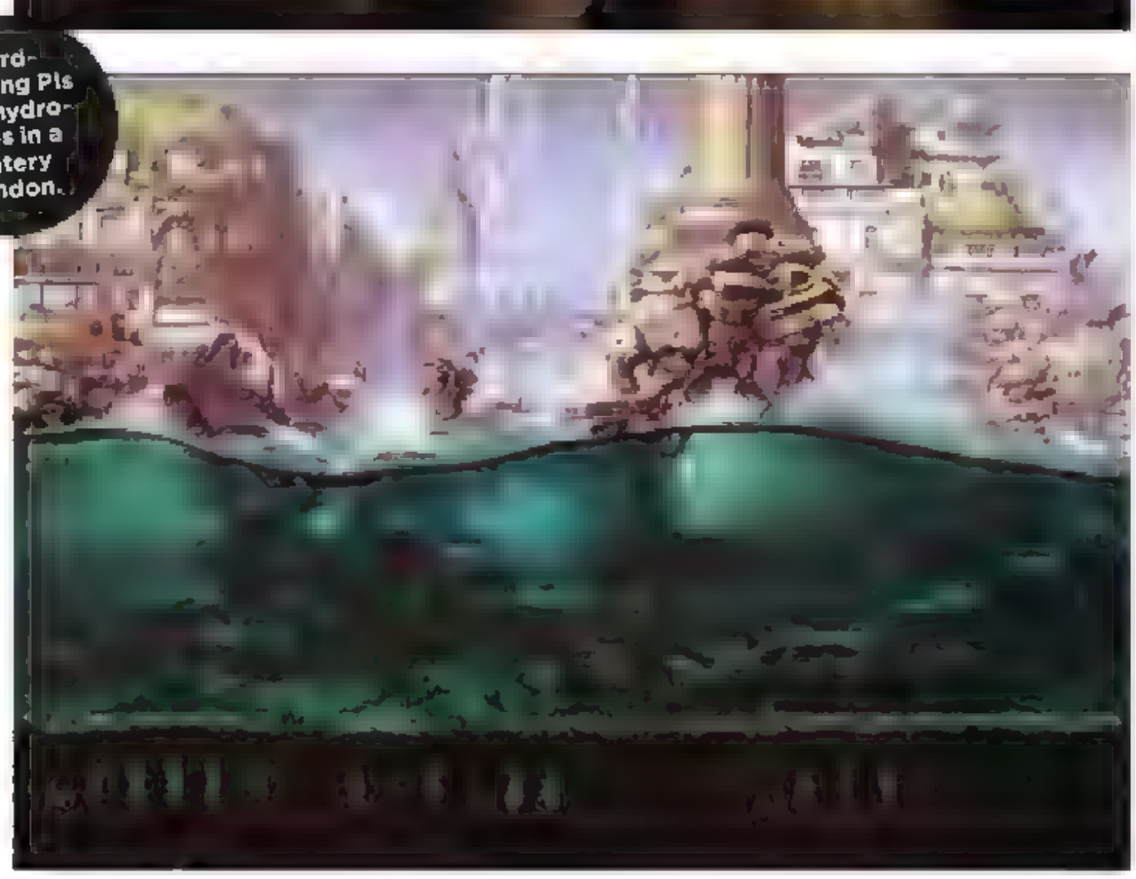


Drowntown is very much in the European album mode, combining lush art with quirky storytelling. Robbie Morrison's script, a noirish tale set in a flooded future London, does not take the easy route. The to-and-fro flashback structure demands the reader's full concentration However, the story is peppered with memorable characters and slick one-liners. There's a lot of fun to be had here.

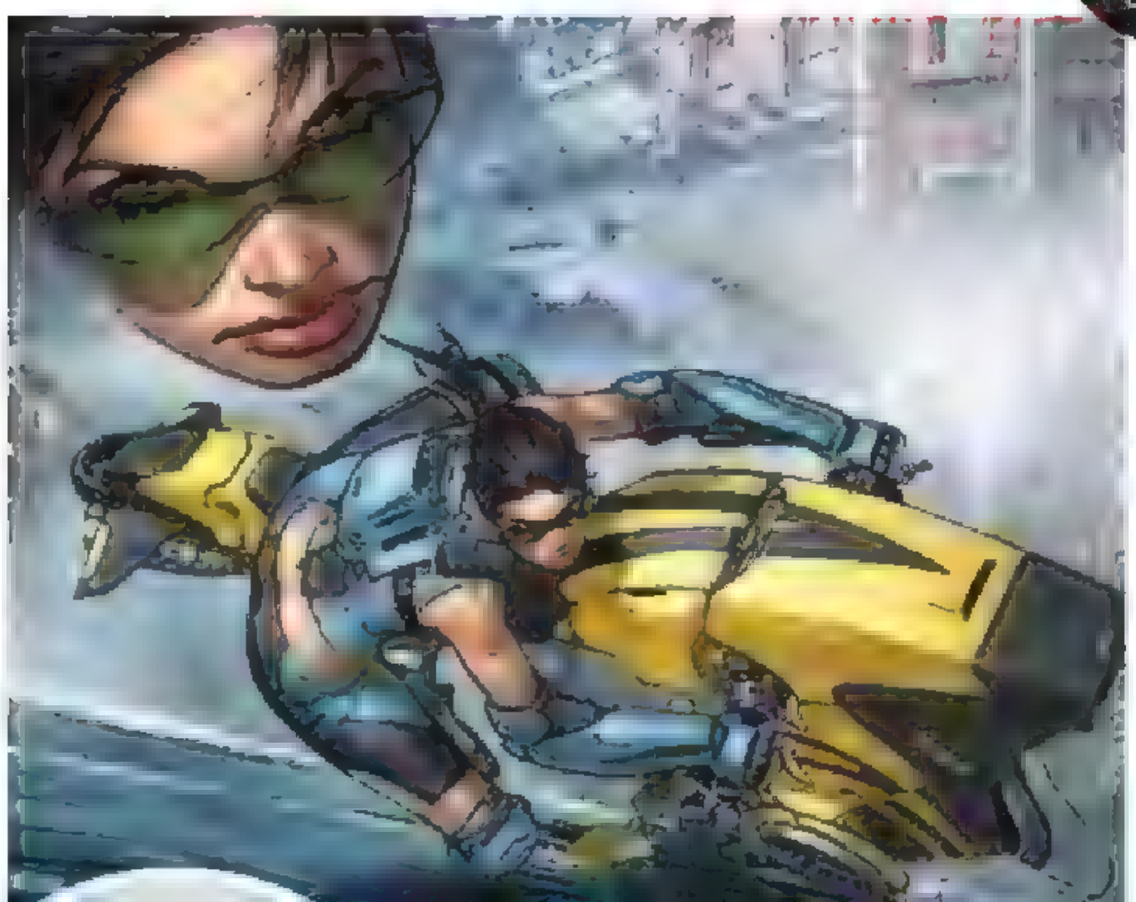
Protagonist Leo Noiret is the archetypal washed-up, alcoholic ex-cop eking a living as a minder. Saved from death by drowning in the toxic cesspool that the Thames has become, he is dragged before Alexandra Bastet, a classic femme fatale. Beautiful (of course) and powerful, she hires Leo to discover who she used to be before she crawled from the wreckage of an aero-car crash in Alexandria one day 17 years ago, with complete memory loss and someone else's blood on her hands.

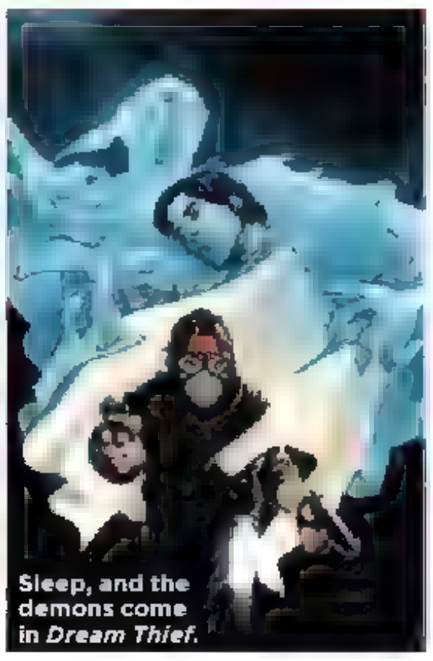
We quickly learn that Alexandra was once spunky hydro-bike courier Gina Cassel, who entered into an ill-advised affair with charismatic playboy tycoon Vincent Drakenberg. As Leo gradually unearths the truth, a pair of hired thugs try to persuade him, not gently, to refrain from investigating further.

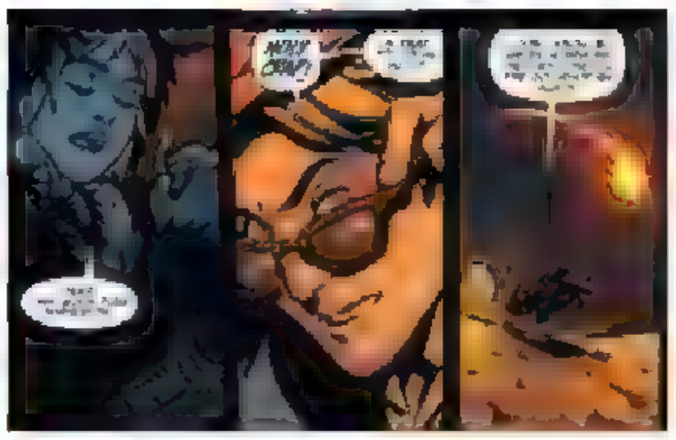
That's all we get in volume one, but it's intriguing and enjoyable enough to make two worth anticipating Jim Murray's vision of our capital, from its swampy underbelly to the soaring penthouses of the mega-rich, is stunning, and he seems to relish drawing sexy women and also the grotesque human/animal genetic hybrids which populate this brave but soggy new world. **James Lovegrove**

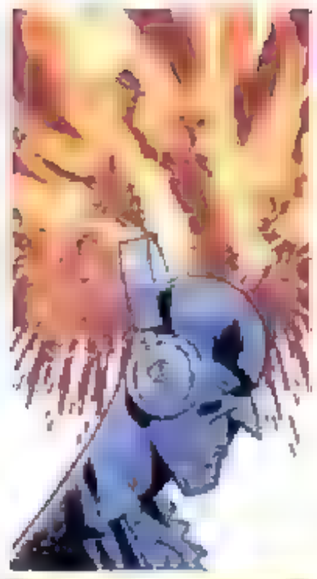


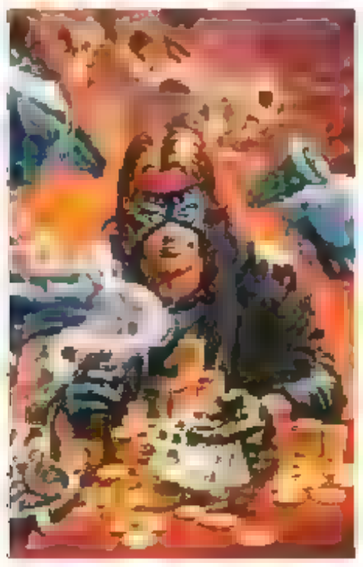
Hard-drinking PIs and hydro-bikes in a watery London.

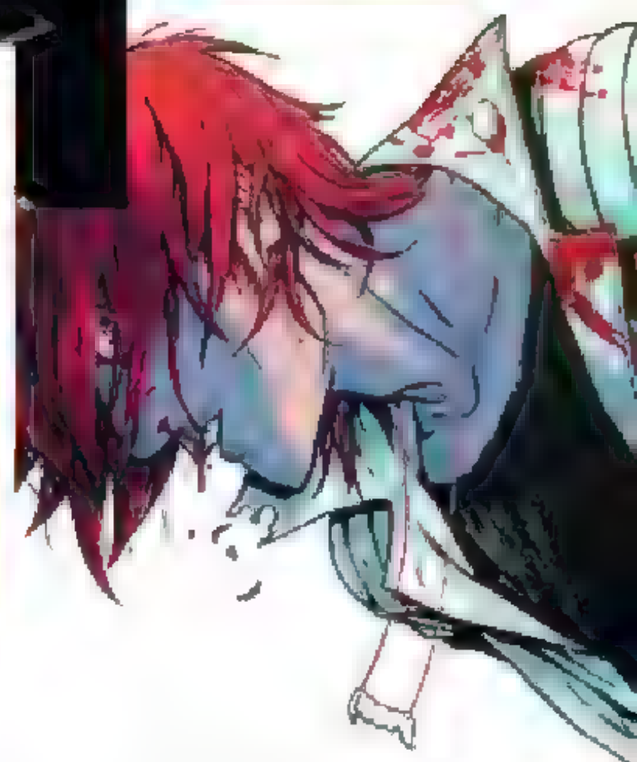












DARK HORSE ROUND-UP

Can anyone keep up with Image? Dark Horse is making a fist of it...

THE TRUE LIVES OF THE FABULOUS KILLJOYS
WRITERS: Gerard Way & Shaun Simon
ARTIST: Becky Cloonan
OUT: Now
★★★★

DREAM THIEF
WRITER: Jai Nitz
ARTIST: Greg Smallwood
OUT: Now
★★★★

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
WRITER/ARTIST: Richard Corben (after Edgar Allan Poe)
OUT: Now
★★★½

Gerard Way, co-founder and lead singer of goth, pop-punk, possibly-emo rock gods My Chemical Romance, shocked the world of comics in 2007 with his props as a writer, his *The Umbrella Academy: Apocalype Suite* miniseries winning an Eisner Award and inspiring a sequel. Now he's back with a new miniseries, co-written with Shaun Simon, illustrated by Becky Cloonan of *American Virgin* fame, and based heavily on the last My Chemical Romance album, *Danger Days: The True Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys*.

Whereas *The Umbrella Academy* was something totally out of the blue, *Killjoys* is directly linked to the iconography and concerns of the band, and thus feels slightly less surprising and special. Which isn't to say it's no good, for the strange post-apocalyptic world it depicts is a fascinating one Much the same tale was told in the final round of MCR videos, with Grant Morrison himself appearing as villain Korse.

This is a complicated tale in grey shades, packed full of characters and intriguing detail – and with most of our sympathy extending towards the cat-loving young girl caught between the rebel bands in the desert and the hyper-clean corporation which rules the city.

Busy, multi-layered, heaving with mysteries and with an intriguing lyricism, this is another strong book from Way – there's something of Paul Pope to it, and Mike Allred's work (especially *Red Rocket 7*), and that ain't bad company to keep.

LIVING NIGHTMARE

Dream Thief, by Green Hornet writer Jai Nitz and artist Greg Smallwood, is a noir crime tale with supernatural elements. In a stoned stupor at a museum party, our not-especially-likeable fuck-up hero steals an aboriginal mask that sees him regularly possessed by spirits seeking vengeance, his sleeping body their tool. Now, if John Lincoln should ever fall asleep, doubtless he'll kill again.

Smallwood's work has a strong noir look to it, but it's the clever storytelling that really delights: the bold, poster-like splash images and neat little inset panels revealing the dead men's skills John suddenly inherits in times of need are classy indeed. The shock revelations and just-so pace make this a definite one to watch.

Meanwhile, Richard Corben – a 2012 Eisner Hall of Fame Inductee, don't ya know? – has his new two-part adaption of Edgar Allan Poe's 1839 Gothic short story *The Fall of the House Of Usher*, the *Heavy Metal* artist (wish-fulfilment barbarian Den being his most famous creation) returning to familiar ground: he's adapted the likes of *The House On The Borderland* by William Hope Hodgson before, and works by Poe and HP Lovecraft too, usually in grey tones.

This new version is at more luxuriant length and much brighter than any of those, painted in autumnal shades of yellow and russet and green, his panels packed with horses and crows, drapes and leaded windows; particularly striking are the odd, nose-dominated faces he gives reclusive artist Roderick Usher and his sister, Madeline.

It's very well crafted, erotic in a highly creepy fashion, and overall something of a success The only question: did we *really* need another version of this macabre old warhorse again? **Matt Bielby**

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGERS

WRITER: Chris Roberson
ARTIST: Scott Kowalchuk
PUBLISHER: Oni Press
OUT: Now
★★★★

Reading *The Mysterious Strangers* is like coming across an old TV show like *The Champions* or *The Protectors* that you've never seen before. The comic is a delirious homage to the days when a team of three affluent jetsetting adventurers – the strongman, the exotic female, the slightly shifty other guy – would travel to exotic locations to carry out espionage assignments and thwart the plans of would-be world conquerors. There's even a 'credit sequence' page in each issue, name-checking the characters and offering highlights of events to come

In the opening arc, 'The Purloined Leader', our intrepid

threesome are despatched by their wheelchair-bound boss Absalom Quince to the Caribbean island of Hidalgo, whose president has unexpectedly declared martial law and severed ties with the United States. The nefarious hand of secret society O.C.C.U.L.T is

detected in this, and soon enough our heroes find enemy agents excavating an ancient temple in the island's jungle interior where a weird green light turns men into bug-eyed mutants.

Roberson has yet to define his team's powers or show how they came by them. All we know so far is that their hands bear sigils which somehow grant supranormal abilities such as strength, super speed, and time manipulation.

Kowalchuk's art, meanwhile, comes from the Darwyn Cooke and Paul Grist school of quick, minimal linework and thick, bold brushstrokes. It's not quite in the league of those two masters yet but it's getting there.

This series is definitely worth your time, whether or not you're old enough to feel nostalgia for the '60s and '70s and the kind of television they just don't make any more. **James Lovegrove**

STAR TREK: THE JOHN BYRNE COLLECTION

WRITER/ARTIST: John Byrne
PUBLISHER: IDW
OUT: Now
★★★★½

This hefty hardcover volume collects all of the *Star Trek* miniseries and one-shots John Byrne produced for IDW between 2008 and 2009. To read them you don't need a PhD in Trekology. If your knowledge of the show begins with William Shatner when he was thin and had all his own hair and ends with William Shatner when he was fat and wore a wig, then you'll be fine

Byrne himself clearly has an abiding love for the Original Series, not to mention a thorough grasp of the ins and outs of its characters and universe.

Assignment: Earth spins off from the 1968 episode of that name, giving us the further adventures of futuristic Bondian super-spy Gary Seven, his sidekick Roberta, and his enigmatic black cat Isis who can transform into a slinky, scantily-clad woman. It's pure retro romp, whereas *Romulans* is, by contrast, a sombre generational saga of military and filial duty.

Crew takes the otherwise unnamed character Number One, first lieutenant to original Enterprise captain Christopher Pike, and extrapolates an entire Starfleet career for her. Pick of the bunch, however, is *Leonard McCoy, Frontier Doctor*, in which the beloved, irascible 'Bones' deals with medical emergencies and conundrums on far-flung worlds Byrne dovetails storylines from the other three series into this one with deftness and ingenuity, a reminder that he isn't just a supremely talented writer/artist but a brilliant weaver of plots as well **James Lovegrove**

CLIVE BARKER'S NEW TESTAMENT

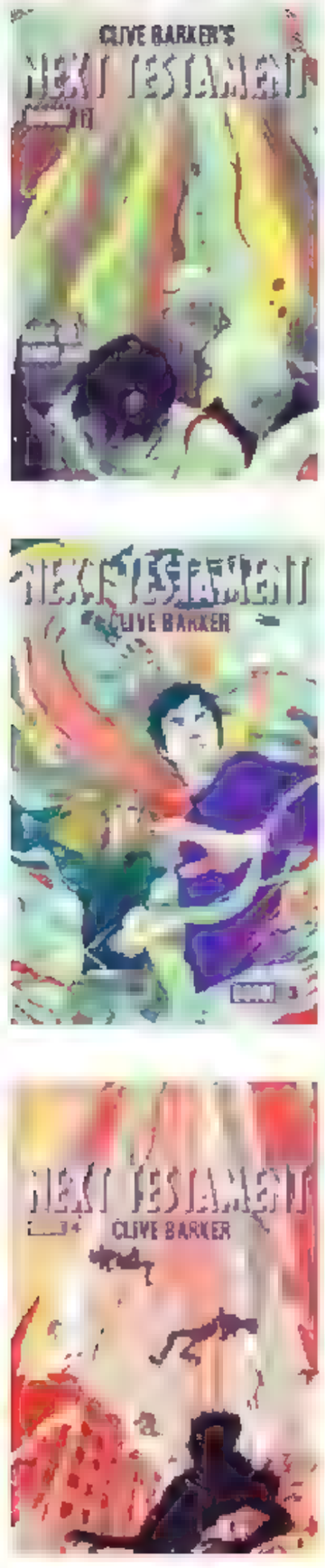
WRITERS: Clive Barker & Mark Millar
ARTIST: Haemi Jang
PUBLISHER: Boom! Studios
OUT: Now
★★★½☆

Liverpool's Clive Barker – the horror and fantasy writer best known for *The Books Of Blood*, *Weaveworld*, and films based on his work, from *Hellraiser* and *Candyman* to *The Midnight Meat Train* – has always painted, often illustrated his own books, and long been interested in comics. For Marvel he launched an imprint called Razorline in 1993, and there've been numerous comic book adaptations of his work over the years – and even the odd original script, mostly for IDW.

Clive Barker's *Next Testament* is the first original 12-issue limited series written and created by him in years, though, and it's a suitably grim old thing. Obsessed, unpleasant millionaire Julian Demond is on a holy mission of some bizarre sort, and along the way uncovers a strange, shining alien being who calls himself 'Wick, the Father of Colors' – more, Wick claims to be the violent Old Testament God, a version of 'the Father' trapped since Biblical times by his mysterious brethren, who we know as 'the Son' and 'the Holy Ghost'. Wick flows with paint colours – a neat visual – and kills indiscriminately; he is clearly extremely powerful, a slick, seductive figure more like the popular version of the Devil than any God we know.

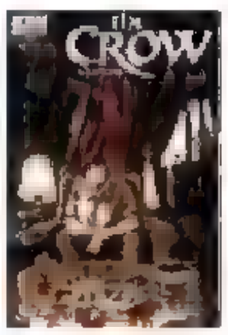
Naturally, Demond's alienated son Tristan, and his smart fiancé Elspeth, are suspicious as hell – Wick himself acknowledges Elspeth as "a dangerous one" – and the scene would appear set for a series of globetrotting *Omen III: The Final Conflict*-style confrontations. Or perhaps not: 12 issues is a fair few, and Barker and co-writer Millar would seem to have plenty of scope for pulling the rug out from under us yet.

With snappy dialogue, likeable heroes and a great-looking villain in walking stained-glass window Wick – his hair and skin an always-changing splodge of shiny ink, like a living painter's palette or oil on water – this is effective horror indeed **Matt Bielby**



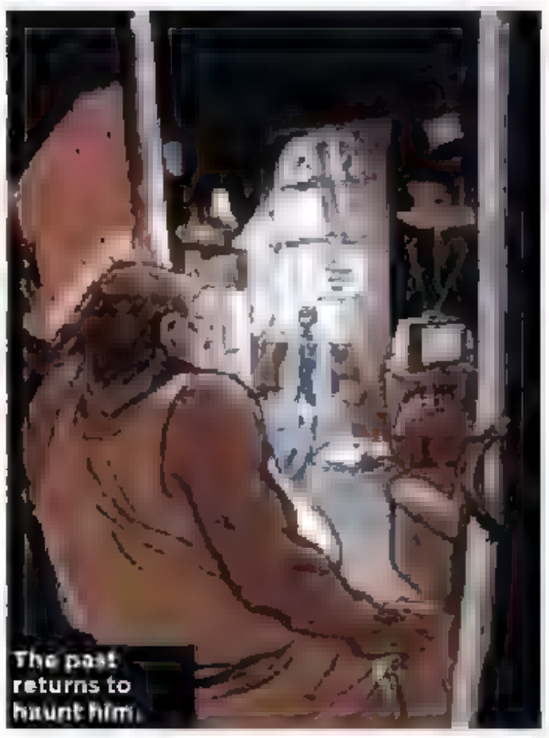
THE CROW: CURARE

WRITER: James O'Barr
ARTIST: Antoine Dodé
PUBLISHER: IDW
OUT: Now
★★★☆



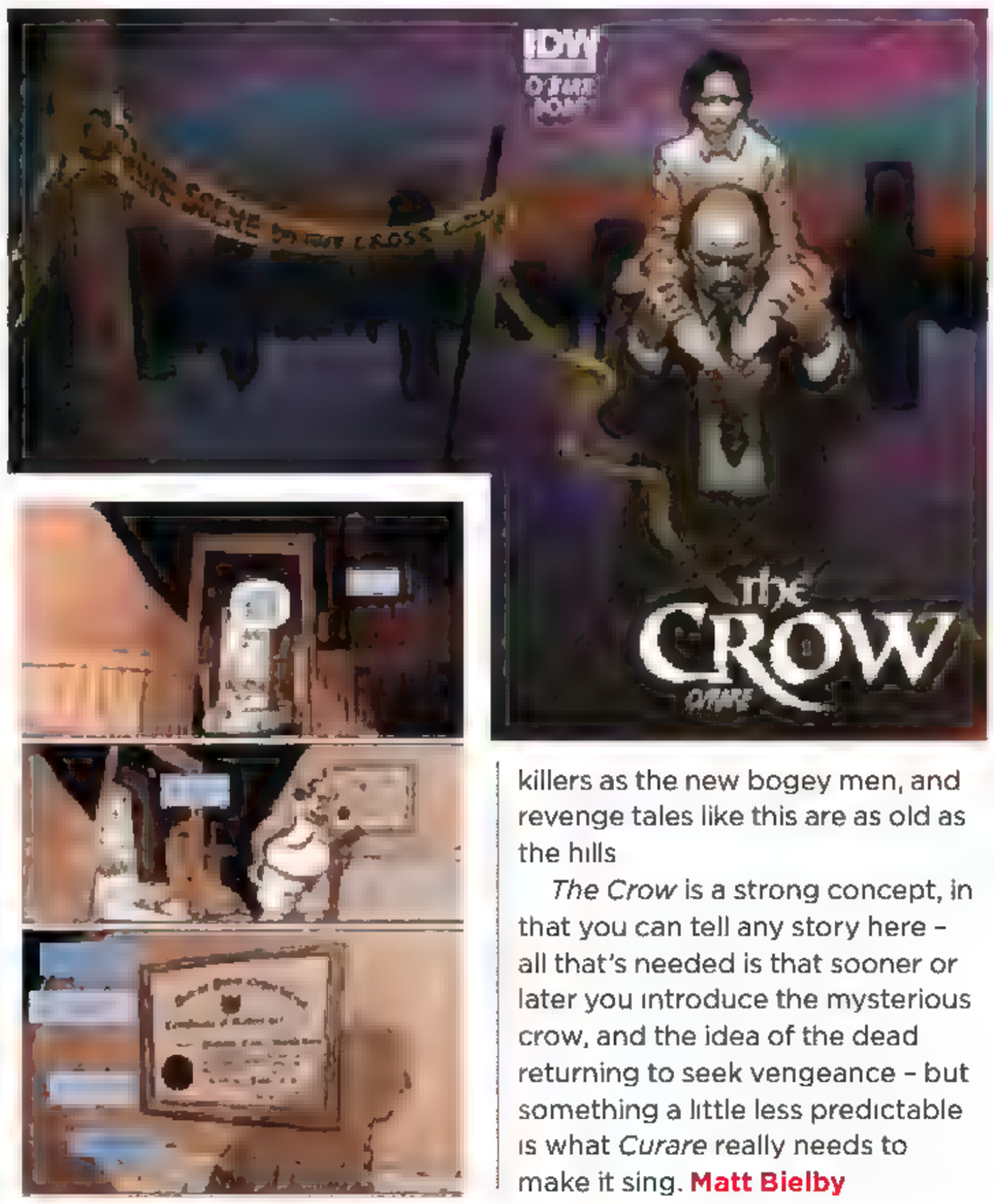
James O'Barr's Crow revenge fantasies have always come from a very angry place, one full of jagged emotions and strikingly clear examples of right and wrong, and so it is with this latest tale, boasting scratchy, organic art by Antoine Dodé in browns, blues and oranges and featuring long silent sequences as the 'camera' stalks cellars and woods.

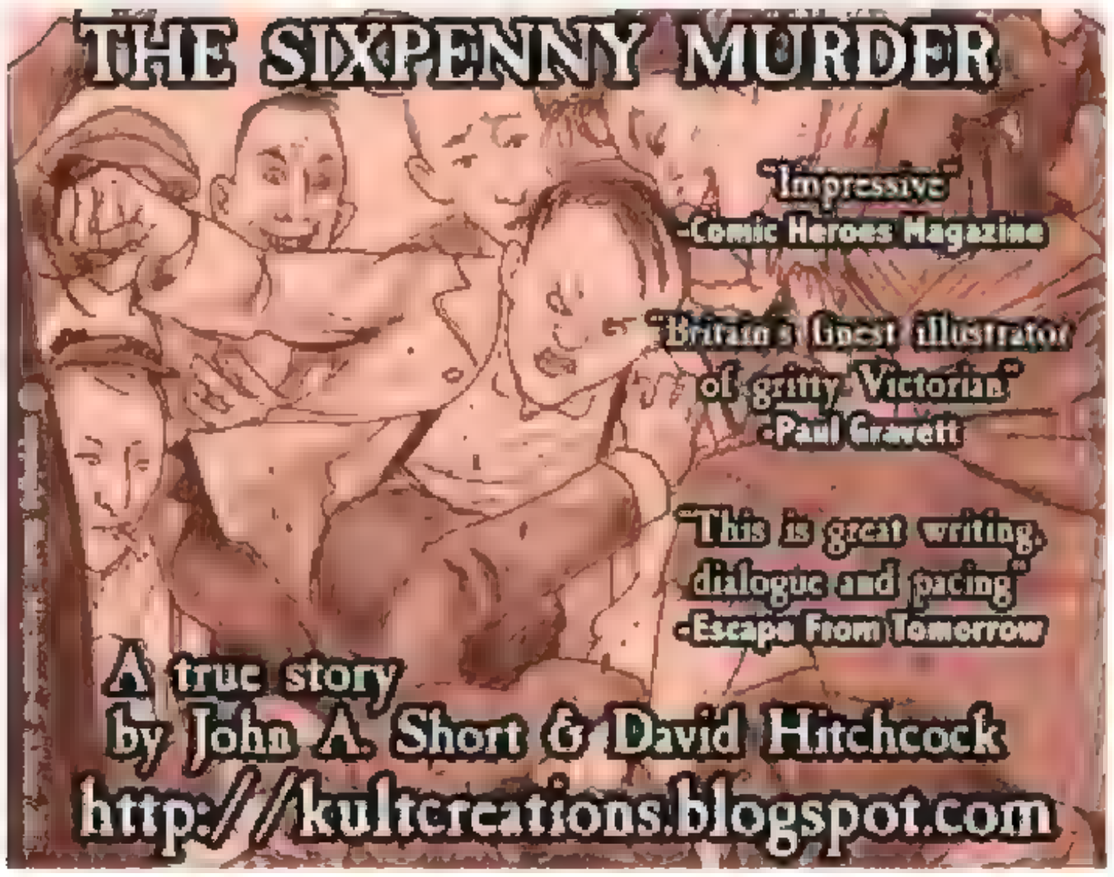
This time our hero is a dangerously on-edge middle-aged cop, forever beating to a bloody pulp suspected child molesters as he seeks justice for a raped and murdered girl, and eventually joined in his obsessive solitude by her ghost and strange pet, a huge black crow. "He won't hurt you," the little girl says. "He's a good birdie."



Slow, unsettling, heaving with despair and very well-told, *The Crow: Curare* has a lot going for it – except for originality. We've seen this sort of broken cop before, not to mention paedophiles and child killers as the new bogey men, and revenge tales like this are as old as the hills

The Crow is a strong concept, in that you can tell any story here – all that's needed is that sooner or later you introduce the mysterious crow, and the idea of the dead returning to seek vengeance – but something a little less predictable is what *Curare* really needs to make it sing. **Matt Bielby**





Stockists of US Comics, Anime & Manga, SF Merchandise and more!
The Sheffield Space Centre
33 The Wicker, Sheffield, S3 8HS.
Tel 0114 2758905
Open 10am to 5pm Mon to Fri
9am to 5pm Sat, Closed Sundays
Visit our website at www.space-centre.co.uk

KRACKERS
KRACKERS COMICS & GAMES
COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • TOYS
WARHAMMER • DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
STAR WARS • MAGIC: THE GATHERING
DR WHO • KID ROBOT • FAMILY GUY
FUTURAMA AND HALO
5 BATH PLACE, TAUNTON, SOMERSET TA1 4ER TEL: (01823) 335 057
WWW.KRACKERS.COM

COMIC HEROES

American GRAFFITI
The Comics Specialist.
Stockists of US comics, Graphic Novels, Manga and much more.
78 Church Lane (Off High Street) Barnstaple
Devon EX31 1BH
Tel: 01271 325740
e-mail: shop@amgrafcomics.co.uk

WELCOME TO ISSUE 20 OF COMIC HEROES!!
This section has been designed so you the Comic Dealer can afford to promote your business from as little as £25.00.
Why not give me a call today on
01225 442244
to discuss getting your shop or mail order business promoted!!

LONDON
FREE ENTRY! DOORS OPEN 12PM
COMIC MART
AT THE ROYAL NATIONAL HOTEL, LONDON, WC1H 0DG...
BUY, SELL & TRADE YOUR COMICS AND COMIC MERCHANDISE
LONDON COMIC MART
2013 DATES
SUNDAY 20TH OCTOBER
SUNDAY 3RD NOVEMBER
SUNDAY 1ST DECEMBER
COMIC EMPIRE
COMICS PULPS MAGAZINES
SUNDAY OCTOBER 20TH
TO BOOK A TABLE CALL
01908671138
QUOTING COMIC EMPIRE
OTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT
MIKE CONROY AT 01322 35332
SKYPE: MIKE_CONROY 48
EMAIL: DEMIGOD@BTCONNECT.COM
FOR MORE INFO VISIT:
WWW.LONDONCOMICMART.COM
Check the website or call: 01908 671138 for event information, latest updates & info on all upcoming events

World's Finest

In conversation with the comic book legends...

Frank Brunner

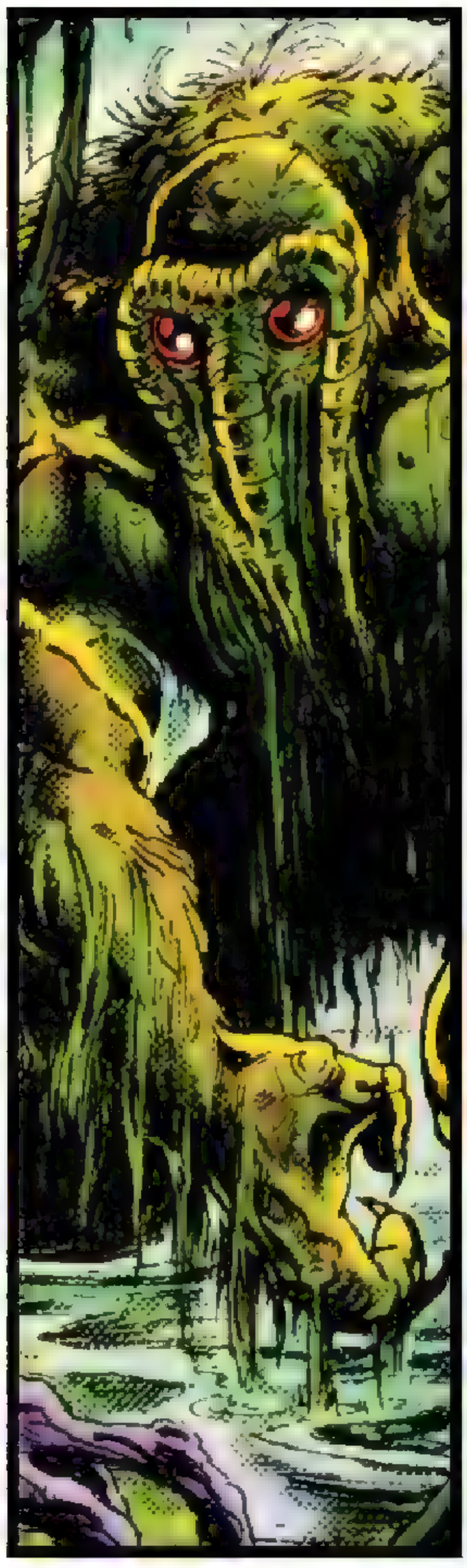
Where bound'ries decay

Words by David Currie

College kids agreed, taking him to their hearts

Frank Brunner was a key member of a talented, idealistic group of young writers and artists – Jim Starlin was one, Steve Gerber another – who broke into Marvel in the early '70s, bubbling with fresh ideas and with creative rebellion in mind. His art was muscular and exotic – echoing the best elements of Frank Frazetta – and quickly gained a following for its illustrative quality, fine figure work and quirky detail.

Brunner didn't last in the mainstream industry long, but the short, exciting runs he had on some of Marvel's oddest, most dynamic titles of the era remain fondly remembered. His *Doctor Strange* was just that little bit stranger than the norm, reflecting – as many saw it – the hallucinogenic



All images © Frank Brunner Marvel and respective copyright holders

01 ***Castle Of Frankenstein*** **#17, Oct 1971**
An early cover for Gothic's horror, sci-fi and fantasy mag.

02 ***Chamber Of Chills*** **#3, Mar 1973**
A Robert E Howard adaptation for Marvel's horror anthology.

03 ***Chamber Of Chills*** **#2, Jan 1973**
Another Robert E Howard classic, adapted by Roy Thomas.

nature of the counterculture of the time, while his barbarians seemed carved out of stone. And his ducks? Well, nobody had quite seen anything like them. Childishly cartoony and painfully realistic both, a feathery fowl called Howard – his co-creation, you could argue, though Brunner drew him but briefly – was to prove a superstar of the counterculture, and one of Marvel's most unexpectedly popular everyman heroes.

During a period of great change at Marvel, somewhere around the mid-point of the Swinging '70s, Brunner helped define some of the era's unlikeliest success stories and kick-started an artistic career that eventually took him away from comics to work in animation, where he largely remains today. Still, it's easy to imagine that it's for the comics that we'll remember him the longest – and, in particular, tales like the brief *Doctor Strange* epic 'A Separate Reality', arguably the most potent and exciting the Master of the Mystic Arts has ever been.

Comic Heroes: Can we start by talking a bit about your early life? Where did you grow up, for instance?

Frank Brunner: In Brooklyn, New York – and I was orphaned at five years old, sort of like Batman! However, I soon discovered I had no real inheritance waiting to be handed to me, so becoming a costumed crime fighter was, sadly, not an option. I had a serious interest in art though and, so I am told, I drew from an early age.

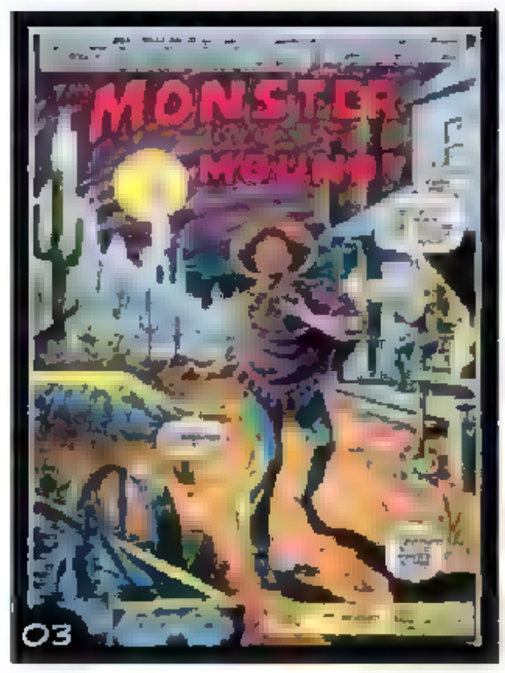
I clearly remember really liking a toy with a clear plastic sheet that you could draw on and then lift up – and it would be blank again. I don't remember what it was called, but it was way better than Etch A Sketch, since it was freeform drawing and not just turning knobs. Later, when I was about 15, I took a test to get into the School of Art and Design in Manhattan; I passed it and was there for four years.

I guess it wouldn't surprise anyone if I said comic books and animation were the biggest influences on me back then, but I only learnt who the creators were later. Names like Wally Wood, Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta were, of course, the important ones.

CH: So which comics first sparked your imagination?

FB: I loved Carl Barks' *Donald Duck* and *Scrooge McDuck* originally; then, a little later, my first 'serious' favourite was Gold Key's *Turok, Son Of Stone* – mainly because, as is the case with many young boys, dinosaurs had become a childhood obsession. I also liked Frazetta's jungle hero, Thun'da.

Later I discovered superheroes, and became interested in drawing stories that I myself would like to read. In the late '50s, comics were very much restrained by the Comics Code Authority, and pretty dull generally; this remained the case until Marvel successfully relaunched its superhero line in the early '60s.



CH: And how did you break into the industry?

FB: Living in New York meant I could show my scribbles around all the major publishers, and in the mid-'60s Warren started publishing black-and-white comics in a magazine format – which meant they were outside the restraints of the Comics Code. I was already familiar with the classic EC Comics, and decided that this genre was what I enjoyed the most at that time, so I just kept plugging away at the art and the publishers until my work became acceptable to them.

Professionally speaking, my first published work was for books like *Castle Of Frankenstein* and *Web Of Horror*; that would be about 1971. Later I worked for Warren and, finally, for Marvel's colour mystery titles.

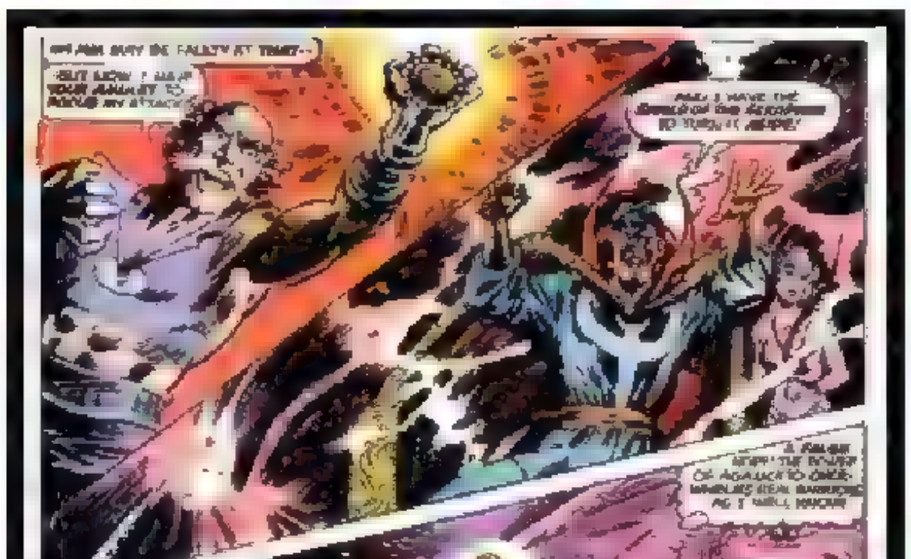
CH: You arrived at 'mainstream' Marvel with a bang in 1972, grabbing everybody's attention with an »

> ***"I loved Carl Barks' Donald Duck"***

01 ***Doctor Strange* #5, Dec 1974**
Brunner's last story on one of his signature characters.

02 ***Doctor Strange* #1, Jun 1974**
Stunning art: one of Brunner's all-time favourite covers.

03 ***Marvel Treasury Edition* #6, 1975**
Doc in all his psychedelic '70s new age glory.



eye-catching run on *Doctor Strange*. You seemed so suited to it, but how did you land such a big gig so soon?
FB: Marvel's Roy Thomas had noticed my work at Warren, and tried me out with a few stories in their *Chamber Of Chills* title. Their ideas for *Doctor Strange* at the time contained a lot of the flavour of the horror stories of Robert E Howard; the strip was part-superhero and part-horror/mysticism – so it only seemed natural that I

should handle the revival of Doc in *Marvel Premiere*, and then his own new series! After all, I was already a big fan of Steve Ditko's original work on the character.

To be honest, I consider my time on *Doctor Strange* as the highlight of my comic career, along with my later work on *Elric*. The covers I drew for issues #1 and #4 of the new *Doctor Strange* book are personal favourite covers of mine, alongside *Giant-Sized Man-Thing* #4.

I even had some involvement with the *Doctor Strange* ABC television movie that appeared in the '70s. A Universal TV producer, Phil Degere, contacted me and wanted me to design a toned-down version of Doctor Strange – one who wore trousers rather than tights – along with several other characters for the TV movie. I didn't think his ideas were particularly good, but I worked with him, hoping for the best. It was very useful to gain some Hollywood experience.

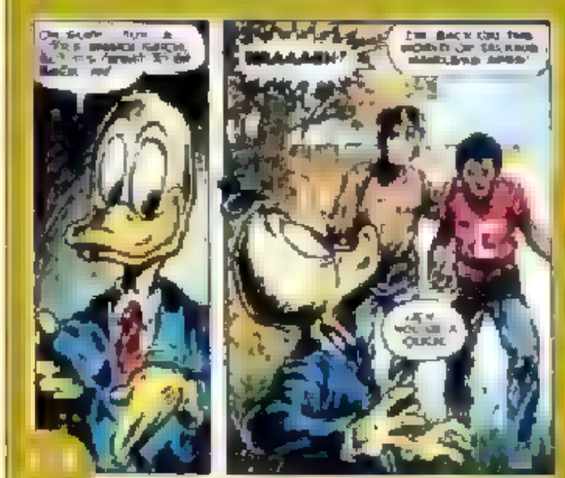
CH: The early '70s was a very busy, exciting time at Marvel, of course...
FB: Oh, the whole *Doctor Strange* period was crazy fun. The Marvel offices were buzzing, since we were the new guys, with new ideas, in town. Of course, I knew many of my fellow young turks: Smith, Wrightson, Kaluta, Starlin, Jones, Reese, Weiss, Englehart, Skeates, Gerber and Conway... The big hangout was at Neal Adams' Continuity Studios, just a few blocks away.

I have many memories from those days, but I'll pick a Doctor Strange related one: I was in NYC briefly – I'd actually moved to the Bay Area in Northern California at the time – and, because I was doing *Doctor Strange* and knew the girl up at the office who opened all the fan mail, I grabbed some unopened letters to look over and see »

> ***The Doctor Strange period was crazy fun – the Marvel offices were buzzing***

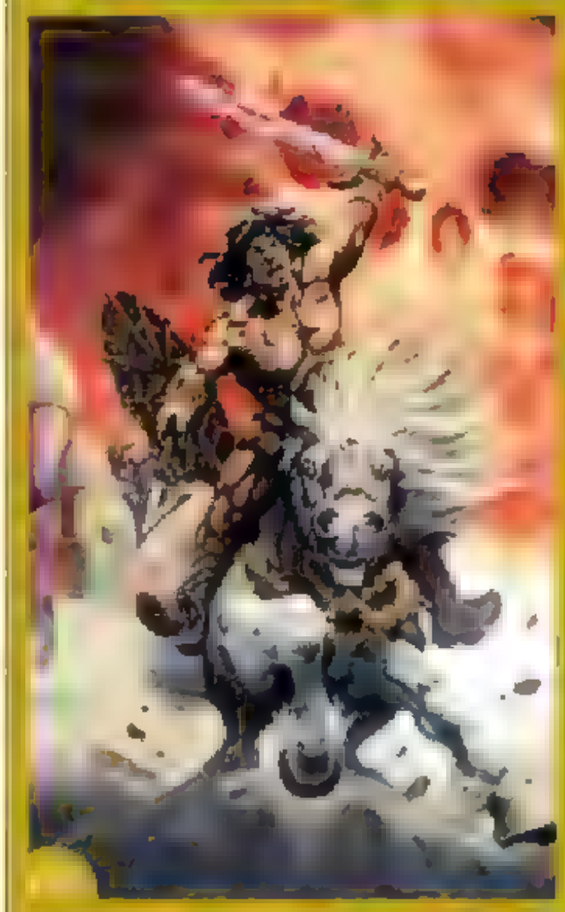
TWENTY YEARS PASSED AND NOT AND SLAUGHTER! AN AGED VALLEN RETURNED TO ROME!
I MUST BE CERTAIN THAT SIDIOUS DIED! HE SHOULD HAVE DIED LONG AGO, BUT
IN THE GREAT PRISON UNDER ROME VALLEN FOUND HIS ANSWER!
SIDIOUS!
VALLEN!
YEARS ON END HAD SIDIOUS BEEN GAINING AT HIS CHAINS NOW AS VALLEN DREW HIS SWORD THE HERO RANGER TORE HIMSELF FREE
FREE! FREE AT LAST!
SNAP!
THEN DIE FREE!!
SIDIOUS FLED AND VALLEN FOLLOWED UP MOLD-ROTTEN STONE STAIRS UP TO THE WORLD OF LIGHT AND MADNESS!
ROME IS DYING, MURDERING ITSELF! BUT I, I WILL LIVE EVEN WHEN ROME IS A MEMORY!
IN THE FLAMING BEEHIVE THAT WAS ROME, VALLEN LOST SIDIOUS, BUT FOUND DEATH!
SUPPORTS BURNED AWAY WALL FALLING I'LL BE CRUSHED!

FOREVER, FOR BEYOND, DARK
MAN BEGINS THINGS TO SHELTER HIMSELF FROM THE MYSTERIES
Through An Orb Darkly
by STEVE ENGLEHART and FRANK BRUNNER
ONE OF THESE THINGS IS HIS REALITY... THE DIMENSIONAL KINGDOM OF THE HASSLES
BUT ONE ALIEN LIVES A DIFFERENT REALITY... A TRUE REAL TO HIM DOES NOT BREAK FROM THE UNIVERSE
COSTANZA | © MEIN COLORS | ROY THOMAS edits
NO M. THEREFORE HIS OWN SHELTER AND THE



Frank Brunner | Major Works

01 CREEPY | 1971-1972
Brunner's first professional work was for Warren's black-and-white, magazine-sized horror comics like *Eerie*, *Vampirella* and, especially, *Creepy* – there his work appeared alongside that of a raft of great Spanish artists such as Luis García and Fernando Fernández.



02 DOCTOR STRANGE | 1972-1973, 1974
Brunner's first Marvel work was an astounding beautiful, atmospheric and convoluted adventure with writer Steve Englehart that spanned this edgiest of superheroes' last *Marvel Premiere* appearances and the start of a run in his own title. The Ancient One was killed, a new enemy called Sise-Neg ('Genesis' backwards) introduced, religious controversy courted, and beautiful, memorable, moving imagery stalked every page.

03 HOWARD THE DUCK | 1975, 1976
Brunner drew the first four Howard solo stories, in two issues of *Giant-Size Man-Thing* and then his solo series; it was powerful stuff, if overshadowed by the great Gene Colan's later work on the series.

04 SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN | 1978
Marvel's black-and-white magazine version of *Conan* used many of the same creators as the colour comic, but – being a magazine – could be more violent and sexy. The Roy Thomas/Frank Brunner adaptation of the Conan short story 'The Scarlet Citadel' is one of many highlights.

05 STAR*REACH | 1974-1977
Mike Friedrich's irregular '70s SF and fantasy anthology and sporadic comic book line sat alongside *Heavy Metal* magazine as a bridge between Marvel and DC and underground comix; Brunner's first contrib, *Duckaneer*, seemed somehow familiar, as did his second, *Quack*...

06 ELRIC | 1979
Not an actual comic strip but a portfolio of images based on the Michael Moorcock fantasy hero, followed by a second, *Stormbringer*; Brunner also did two *Alice In Wonderland* portfolios, amongst others.

01 ***Man-Thing* #1, Jan 1974**

Brunner's Man-Thing wades through the murky swamp.

02&3 ***Giant-Size Man-Thing* #4, May 1975**

One of Brunner's most powerful Bronze Age covers; Howard the Duck makes his first solo appearance, taking on Garko the Man-Frog.

what the readers were saying about the book. The very first one I opened was from Hawaii, and inside was a huge joint of rolled marijuana: and not just regular weed but Maui Wowie!

So we went into some empty room, passed the joint around, and after a few minutes we all had the same thought – lunch! [Laughs] When we finally decided where to eat, after a rather wild taxi ride across town, I thought: you know, I must be doing the right kind of stories in *Doctor Strange*!

TRAPPED IN A WORLD HE NEVER MADE

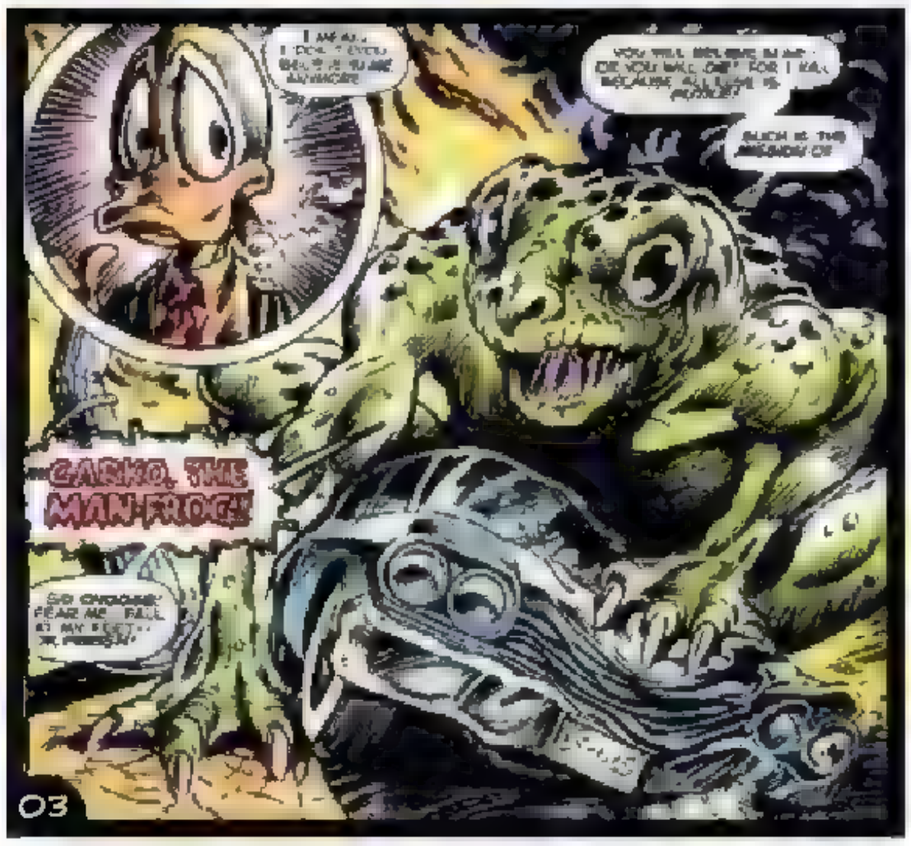
Frank followed up his time on *Doctor Strange* with work on another, equally oddball title: *Howard The Duck*, a character first introduced in *Giant-Size Man-Thing* before transferring to his own title in 1975. Trying to explain Howard – the singular creation of its talented, oddball writer, Steve Gerber, and very much a product of its times – to the current generation of younger comic readers is akin to attempting to describe a really cool party you went to back in the day: sure it was great, but it doesn't fully translate.

Suffice to say, for a few brief years a bad-tempered cartoon duck was one of Marvel's top-selling books, as well as standing as a brave, poignant study of the human condition as it appeared at the time.

CH: How did the regular assignment on Howard, in *Man-Thing* and then in his own title, come your way?

FB: I had just wrapped up 10 issues of *Doctor Strange* and was looking for something completely different to draw – and along came Howard the Duck! I was available, so I called Steve Gerber and he sent me the script for 'Man-Frog', Howard's first solo story in *Giant-Size Man-Thing* #4. I sorta knew right away how I wanted Howard to look, somewhat inspired by my childhood memories of Carl Barks' work. I just had to make him a bit different, with a thicker, wider beak, big expressive eyes and the ever-present cigar.

Of course, I also had Howard's original two-panel walk-on appearance in *Adventure Into Fear* #19, by Val Mayerik, as a guide, so I wasn't entirely responsible for what he looked like. But Beverly Switzler, Howard's human girlfriend and sidekick, was 100% mine. Beverly was actually based on one of my girlfriends at the time; the character's name was Steve's idea, but the visual and her every nuance was my creation. The first issue of *Howard* was co-plotted by Steve and me.



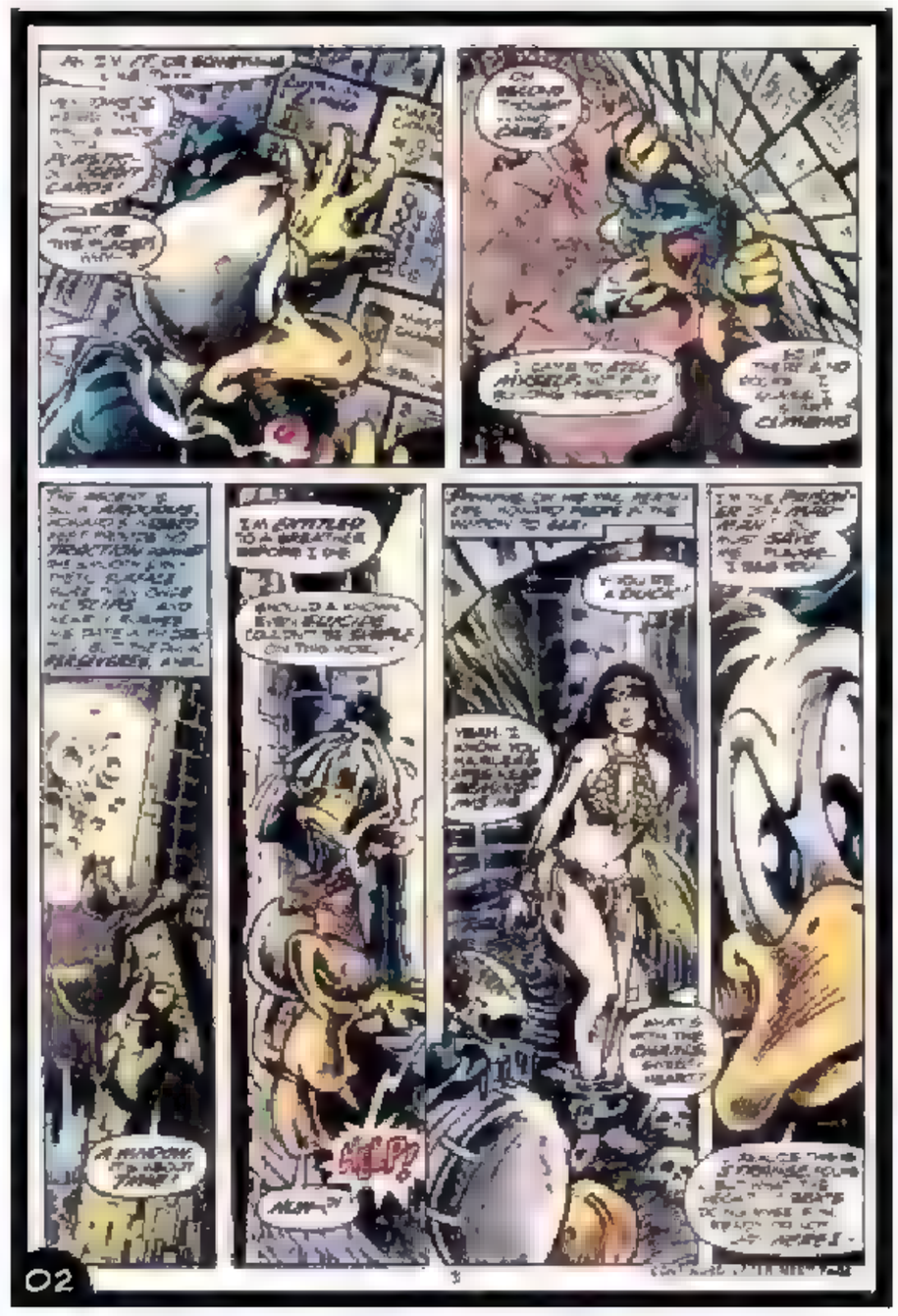
> ***Howard's human girlfriend, Beverly, was based on one of my girlfriends at the time***

01&2 ***Howard The Duck* #1, Jan 1975**

The cigar-smoking waterbird gets his own title, and teams up with Spidey! Brunner's fine lines and detailed shading bring depth and a sense of realism to an otherwise cartoonish character.

03 ***Howard The Duck* #2, Mar 1975**

Another ace Brunner cover, mixing cartoon and superhero styles.



CH: Was the Duck's dizzy rise to superstardom a shock to you at all?

FB: Actually, it didn't surprise me that such an initially throwaway character was a big cult hit, because this was the '70s, and he was a wild departure from everything Marvel had been doing at the time. People like that – and college kids across the USA agreed, taking him to their hearts. They made *Howard The Duck* Marvel's biggest new hit from then until the *Star Wars* comic came out a year or two later. I'm still fond of the character, and recently drew a new cover for the *Howard The Duck Omnibus* hardcover edition.

CH: What are your abiding memories of working with Steve Gerber, and why did you quit the book so abruptly?

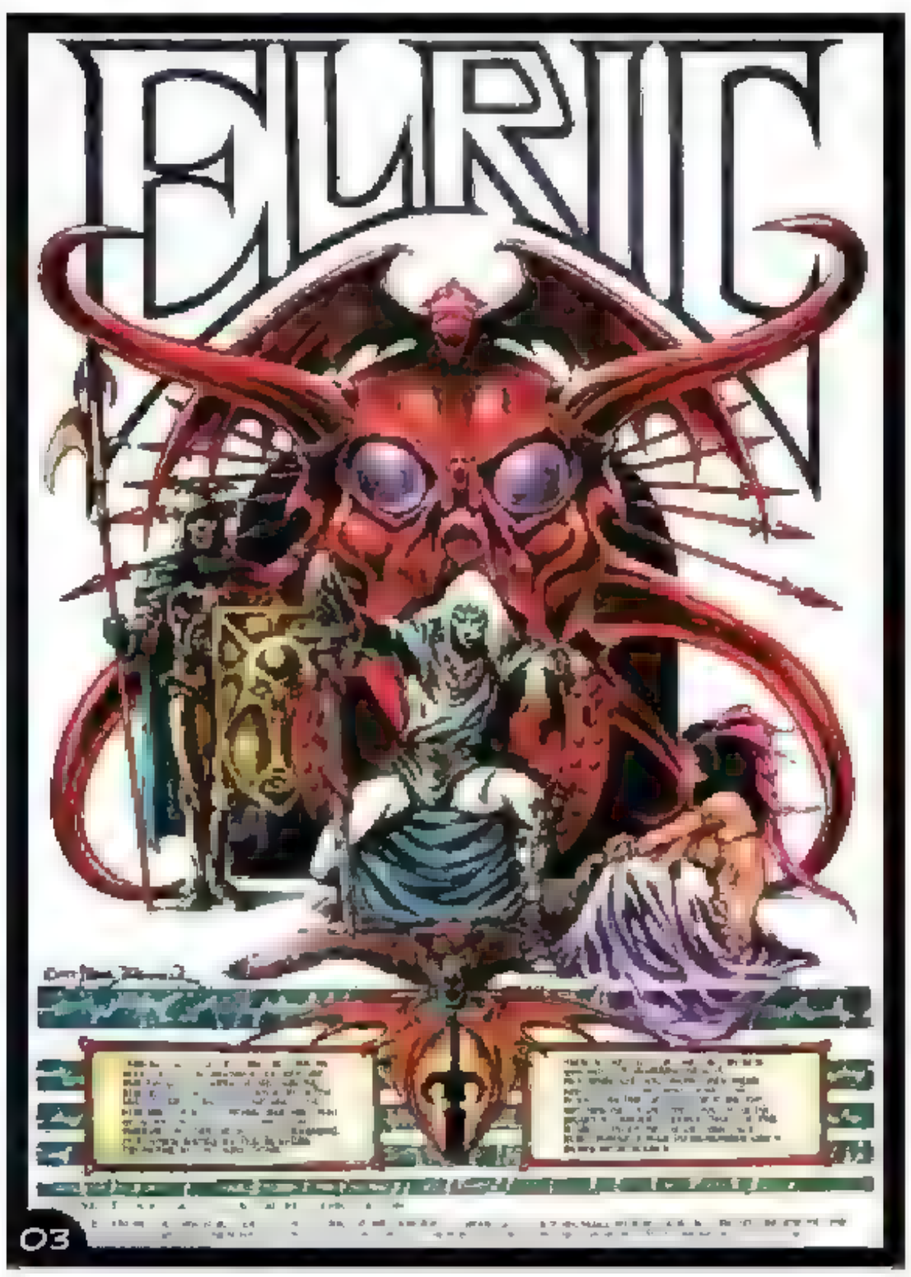
FB: Steve was crazy! And I liked that. He thought outside the box. However, it wasn't long – since I simply could not come to terms with Marvel over my page rate – before I quit *Howard*, following the second issue. I guess I was thinking Marvel would reconsider, but they didn't! So, in response, I created *Scarface Duck* and *The Duckaneer* for Quack Comics, published by Star*Reach. Gerber didn't like that – but I couldn't just drop the whole thing just because Marvel was being stupid and a tightwad!

CH: One other work of yours many remember distinctly from around the same time was 'The Scarlet Citadel', the huge Robert E Howard adaptation you drew for *Savage Sword Of Conan*. The amount of detail you put into each and every page was stunning, and it looked liked you were having a blast with the Hyborian world...

FB: Oh, I loved that particular story. It had everything – swords and sorcery, of course, but also huge battle scenes, dungeon horrors, two wizards, a flying dinosaur and one helluva big snake! It took forever to draw, and I put in far too much work on it, but I was happy with the final results. »

01

02



03

01&2 ***Savage Sword Of Conan* #30, Jun 1978**
Alongside Roy Thomas, Brunner adapted Robert E Howard's famous *Conan The Barbarian* in a beautiful 42-page epic 'The Scarlet Citadel'.

03 ***Heavy Metal*, Sep-Dec 1979**
A Michael Moorcock collaboration for *Heavy Metal*.

CH: Did Michael Moorcock personally approach you to collaborate on *Elric* for *Heavy Metal*, following the Conan job?

FB: Shortly after my Marvel time I'd done an art portfolio featuring Elric, as one of my publishers, Star*Reach, had bought the rights to do an adaptation of the character. Later I met Michael Moorcock at a show in California and we had dinner together. It was a fantastic time, especially when he said to me, 'Your Elric *is* Elric!'

CH: How did the later move to Hollywood, and a career shift into animation, come about?

FB: Comics had imploded – once again! – so I considered this my opportunity to make a mark in Hollywood instead. I wanted to design fantasy films, but I wound up doing animation, mostly

My memories of this period are mixed: all the glamour and famous people I was rubbing shoulders with were intoxicating, and it gave me a perspective about success and the whole Tinsel Town myth – a real look behind the curtain. But there was a seriously bad side too.

One thing I learned real quick is that you've got to have a thick skin and wear sturdy spiritual body armour – especially on your back! You would not believe how competitive and vicious it really is. There were a lot of small, insecure people there who, once they realised who I was… well, let's say the knives were not so well hidden!

But the best people I met were also some of the most creative: Steven Spielberg and Ridley Scott, to name a couple. And I did work at every major studio, except Paramount. I'm not sure why Paramount was different; it just worked out that way.

The best experience I had was as chief character designer on *X-Men: The Animated* series, the hit TV show of the '90s. Many of the characters were already in existence for this show when I started, but there were hundreds of others that needed to be designed and I found that creatively satisfying. One episode featured Wolverine in Japan, and I took the liberty of using my wife as the model for his girlfriend; I even changed the character's name to my wife's, Kisara. It was fun to be

> ***"You would not believe how competitive and vicious Hollywood really is"***

01 ***Red Sonja* #12, Nov 1978**
Brunner's style was well suited to Marvel's *Red Sonja*.

02 ***Epic Illustrated* #12, Jun 1982**
This cover for Marvel's comic anthology is a Brunner favourite

03 ***Star Wars* commission**
A pencil-drawn Jabba slobbers over Princess Leia.

working, at last, on a big hit show. I also enjoyed my time at Dreamworks very much. The worst times were at Disney and Sony/Columbia.

CH: Which do you find more demanding: comics or animation?
FB: It's really a matter of responsibilities. When I draw a comic story I'm usually the director, set designer, costume designer and head of casting! In Hollywood it's all broken down into specific tasks, and you start with a shooting storyboard – while in comics you're actually creating the storyboard as well. So, I guess, comic storytelling is the most demanding.

CH: But you also enjoy painting...
FB: Oh yes, I love to paint. But not when it's a rush deadline, since I have no standard formula to apply. I tend to look at painting as an adventure – sometimes even I don't know how it will all turn out. I've produced many paintings over the years: comic and book covers, commissions – like a great portrait of Howard called 'Sitting Duck' – and even record album covers. That came about because I had a deal with an art agent in Germany, and he knew all these German Heavy Metal bands

If I had to pick favourites, though, it would be my Elric paintings, and a painting of a mermaid called 'Red Octopus' that was used as the cover for Marvel's *Epic Illustrated* #12. I spent a year putting together my definitive art book – *Mythos: The Fantasy Art Realms of Frank Brunner*, published by Vanguard – and a lot of my paintings are in there.

CH: What's your output speed for comic pages these days?
FB: I used to be faster than I am now, but not much faster! Let's put it this way: back in the day, if I had two or maybe three weeks to pencil 17 pages and a cover, it would be no problem. That was how fast I was! But if I had a year to do a story, I'd probably take that long – like it was with 'The Scarlet Citadel'.

CH: What's the future for comics, do you think?
FB: Well, I don't think they have any real future on paper. It seems that their main function these days is to provide Hollywood with 'new to them' ideas instead. Otherwise we'd see only regurgitation and remakes from those guys. Maybe online comics are the future, but I'm unsure: I just wish they would look more individual – computer colouring is making them all look the same.

CH: What are you doing today?
FB: There are my covers for various independent comic publishers, of course – I recently finished a cover painting for a handsome hardcover collection of *The Heap* for the British outfit, PS Artbooks, for instance – and I do a lot of commissions too, especially if I like the subject.

As an example, I recently did nine full-page illustrations depicting highlights of the Silver Surfer's origin story for a famous European movie director. Now that really *was* fun!

To discover more about Frank Brunner – and to contact him if you want to talk about your dream project! – take a look at www.frankbrunner.net

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

SAVE £££s WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE!

If you're buying every issue of *Comic Heroes* then why not subscribe? Pay **£14.99** every six months and get every issue delivered to your door before it hits the newsstand!

I say thee pay!

But, it turns out, not very much. Even valiant Volstagg, that fine-figured warrior of the Realm Eternal and a god oft beset by financial worries – young godlings to feed, a mighty appetite to support, so forth – would surely find this a fine deal: so mighty an organ, so miniscule a price.

Matt Bielby
Editor

WHAT YOU'LL PAY

UK £14.99 every six months by direct debit or just £29.99 a year for four issues

1. www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/COHP1P
2. Call 0844 848 2852 and quote 'COHP1P'

(Lines are open 8am-9.30pm weekdays and 8am-4pm Saturday)

Closing date is 18 October 2013

Live outside the UK?
For fantastic savings visit www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/comic-heroes

WHY SUBSCRIBE?

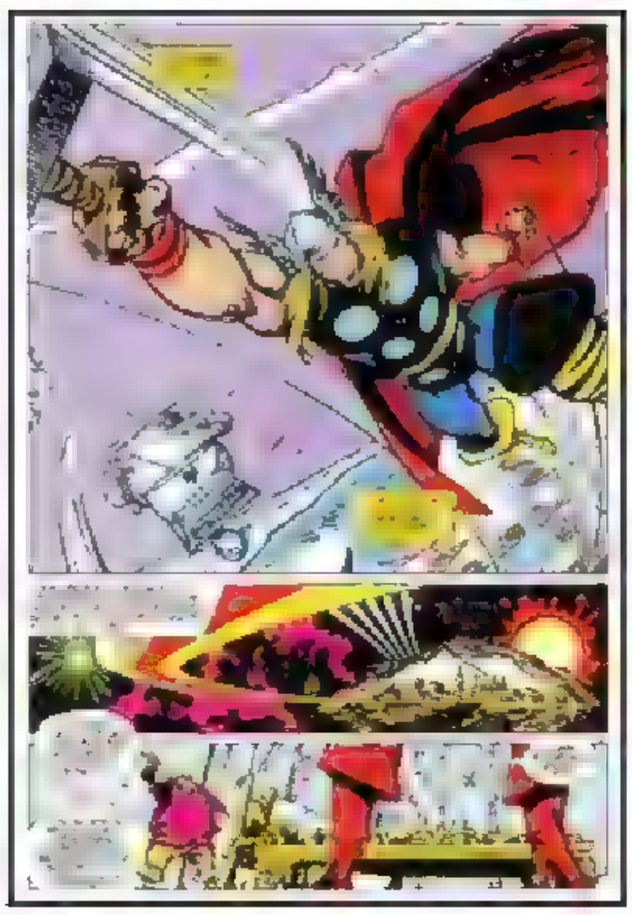
- SAVE £££s!
- EVERY ISSUE DIRECT TO YOUR DOOR!
- NEVER MISS AN ISSUE!

Terms and Conditions Savings compared to buying four full-priced issues from UK newsstand. This offer is for new UK print subscribers paying by direct debit only. You will receive four issues in a year. Full details of the direct debit guarantee are available on request. If you are dissatisfied in any way you can write to us to cancel your subscription at any time and we will refund you for all unmailed issues. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. For full terms and conditions please visit www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk/terms. Offer ends 18 October 2013

YOUR 4 FREE GIFTS
2 COMICS! LOCAL HEROES AND HUGE SAMPLER COMIC
80 PAGES OF STRIP! PLUS 2 FREE POSTCARDS!
COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • MOVIES • TV • GAMES
COMIC HEROES
HOW HULK REDEFINED HEROES
HULK SMASH!
THE ZOMBO INTERVIEWS
HERE BE MONSTERS! ULTIMATE CREATURE COUNTDOWN
THE WALKING DEAD
BRIAN K VAUGHAN
EARTH SANVIS • KEVIN MACSHANE • CHARLES BURNS
ANDY KUBERT • CLIFF CHIANG • AND HERO TRIMPE!
IBLE GIFTS
Official Iron Man Pin Badge
Giant-Size Sidekick
Free Judge Dredd P
4 AMAZING FREE GIFTS!
FREE 2000 AD BADGES
FREE 52-PAGE COMIC SAMPLER
FREE POSTCARD
COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • MOVIES • TV • GAMES
COMIC HEROES
ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE NEW SUPERMAN
NEW COSTUME! NEW ENEMIES! NEW MOVIE!
WIN!
WHAT'S UP WITH PETER PARKER?
SNYDER! ON BATMAN
WAGNER! ON JUDGE DREDD
MILLAR! ON KICK-ASS 3
NEVER MISS AN ISSUE!
COMIC HEROES
THE MIGHTY THOR
GODZILLA / HOWARD THE DUCK / V FOR VENDETTA
3 MIGHTY FREE GIFTS
COMICS • GRAPHIC NOVELS • MOVIES • TV • GAMES
COMIC HEROES
ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THOR
HIS GREATEST ENEMIES
HIS BIGGEST BATTLES
HIS SECRET ORIGIN
INSIDE THE NEW FILM
THOR: THE DARK WORLD
X-CLUSIVE INTERVIEW
SUPER MOVIE PREVIEW 2014
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2
X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST
CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER
DOCTOR STRANGE · GODZILLA · V FOR VENDETTA
AND ROCK BOP TURNER COMIC WRITER BRIAN WAY
GO DIGITAL!
Comic Heroes on iPad and Android devices
Search for Comic Heroes on your favourite device and start your free trial subscription today!
zinio
nook
GET THE MAGAZINE ON Google play
amazon for Android
Available on the App Store

iPad is a trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the US and other countries. App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc.
Google Play is a trademark of Google Inc. NOOK is a registered trademark of Barnes & Noble, Inc. NOOK Tablet is a trademark of Barnes & Noble, Inc

BIG ISSUES



THOR #337 | **STORY** 'Doom' | **BY** Walt Simonson | **DATE** Nov 1983

"I have the power!"

Thor's greatest run ever reconciled the barminess of the ancient Nordic bards' imaginings with the demands of Marvel's hip modern sensibilities.

By James Lovegrove

The Mighty Thor was looking distinctly un-mighty by the early '80s. The Stan 'n' Jack glory years were long gone. The seam of superheroes-meets-mythology had been mined to death, and nobody had any fresh ideas.

Enter Walt Simonson. He had already done a brief stint on *Thor* in the late '70s, but in 1983, when he took over as writer, penciller and inker, he brought a bold new vision to the material.

He didn't disregard the Thunder God's status as an iconic, integral part of the Marvel U, but neither did he neglect the Norse sagas in which Thor played a central role. The brilliance of his run is that it fused these two aspects of Thor together in a way that no one had before, or (indeed) has since.

Here was the Avengers team member we all knew, who could travel into outer space and battle monstrous villains on Earth, yet he was also a god who rode around in a cart drawn by a pair of giant goats. Here was Stan Lee's caped, helmeted, hammer-whirling hero with the cod-Shakespearean speech patterns, but also the headstrong, fallible Odinson of the Eddas.

Simonson's masterstroke came with his very first issue. The cover said it all: an alien with a bizarre, toothily equine face swinging a hammer through the masthead, smashing it and the indicia box to pieces. Who was this guy? He was dressed a lot like Thor. His hammer looked a lot like Mjolnir. What Simonson seemed to be saying to readers was: 'All bets are off. You think you know what to expect from *The Mighty Thor*? Think again.'

Rarely had a creative new broom been wielded with quite such bravado and audacity. Frank Miller had performed a similar act on *Daredevil* a couple of years earlier, but he had taken a run-up beforehand, collaborating with writer Roger McKenzie, gradually finding his way. Simonson came in all guns blazing. It was startling, breathtaking, thrilling.

The alien cover star was Beta Ray Bill, and daft as that name may have seemed, it was also somehow *right*. It mixed the exotic with the commonplace, both cosmic and down-home. What else would a blue-collar extraterrestrial be called?

Bill had volunteered to have his soul installed in an artificially created superbody so that he could act as guardian for the rest of his race, who lay frozen in cryo-sleep aboard a fleet of spaceships escaping the destruction of their home galaxy. Thor might look like the perfect Aryan übermensch. Bill, by contrast, was monstrously grotesque. Both, though, were noble warriors, protectors of the defenceless, loyal to their people.

Hence Bill was able to do what nobody else in Marvel history other than Thor himself had ever done before: lift Thor's hammer. That was the real shock moment of *Thor* #337, when Bill unthinkingly pounded Dr Don Blake's walking stick against a wall and was transformed into an alien version of Ol' Goldilocks. Even the Hulk hadn't been able to raise Mjolnir off the ground, but then such was Bill's purity of soul that he met the criterion of the magically inscribed words 'Whosoever holds this hammer, if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor'. Bill fit the bill.

For the rest of Simonson's run anything was possible. Old villains like Surtur the fire demon returned, bigger and meaner than before. Loki was up to his usual tricks, but now demonstrating far greater finesse and subtlety. Lesser characters such as Balder and Sif were given decent storylines for once. Volstagg the Voluminous became bearable, rather than just a tedious overweight buffoon. It all felt familiar but new, absurd but credible, a classical epic poem in four-colour form.

ORDER YOURS TODAY!

WWW.WHOSOUNDS.COM
DOCTOR WHO EXPERIENCE
FORBIDDEN PLANET
BBCSHOP.COM
AMAZON

PRODUCT FEATURES

- Wireless Bluetooth Speaker
- Remote control
- AUX cable included
- Land sound played when pairing to Bluetooth
- Scaled model of 11th edition TARDIS
- USB charger for smartphones
- Powerful 2.1 speakers

www.Amazon.co.uk
www.bbcshop.com
www.forbiddenplanet.com
www.doctorwhoexperience.c

£150 SRP
BUY NOW!

The Wireless Bluetooth TARDIS SPEAKER IN STOCK NOW
Play music from any universe!

(word marks and devices) TARDIS, DALEKS, CYBERMAN and K-9 (word marks and devices) are trademarks of the British Broadcasting Corporation and are used under licence. Doctor Who logo © 2012 and TM BBC. Licensed by BBC WW Ltd

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE TARDIS SPEAKER

Designed, manufactured and distributed by WhoSounds Ltd www.whosounds.com

COMPATIBLE WITH

BBC

INTO COMICS?

Over 1 Million items from the 1930's Onwards.
Comics - Action Figures - Toys - Statues - Busts
Autographs - Graphic Novels - Manga

75,000 Unique Items For Sale Online!

JOB DONE!

Incognito Comics & Collectables
PO Box 431, Dover, Kent, CT16 9ED
Tel 01304 832335
email: sales@incognitocomics.co.uk

eBay Power Seller - Amazon Preferred Seller
Listed as: Incognito Comics And Collectables

JOIN US @ INCOGNITOCOMICS

All Marvel characters and the distinctive likenesses thereof are Trademarks & Copyright

GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

ISSUE No.7 S/O 2013

FREE WITH COMIC HEROES ISSUE 20

THE BEST NEW COMICS PREVIEWED INSIDE!

IN ASSOCIATION WITH SELF MADE HERO

WWW.SELFMADEHERO.COM

DEATH SENTENCE

LIFE: IT WAS FUN WHILE IT LASTED

MARCH

CIVIL RIGHTS MEGA-EPIC!

52 PAGES OF AMAZING STORIES!

PLUS
THE FIRST KINGDOM
THRUD THE BARBARIAN
IT CAME!

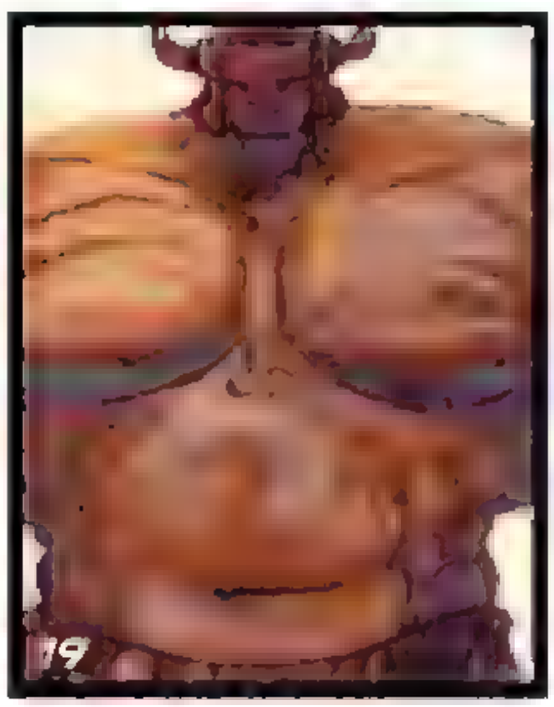
GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

#7 September/October 2013

Inside this issue...

The First Kingdom

By: Jack Katz
From: Titan Comics
© 2013 Jack Katz
Out 24 September
www.titan-comics.com



Thrud The Barbarian

By: Carl Critchlow
From: Titan Comics
© 2013 Carl Critchlow
Out 24 September
www.titan-comics.com

March: Book One

By: Congressman John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell
From: Top Shelf Productions
© John Lewis, Andrew Aydin & Nate Powell
Out now
www.topshelfcomix.com

It Came!

By: Dan Boultwood
From: Titan Comics
© 2013 Dan Boultwood
Out now
www.titan-comics.com

CAMDEN:

Funny what you remember in the pivotal moments:

Dust motes swirling in sunlight...

The burr of the consultant's voice...calm and hypnotic...

My new shoes - pinching my heels.

Yesterday I felt guilty for spending so much. Today...

EXCUSE ME -- ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING?

EVERY...

FUCKING...

WORD.

MISS FETTE... THE VIRUS IS GOING TO ENHANCE AND THEN KILL YOU. THERE IS NO CURE.

YOU CAN EITHER DO SOMETHING WITH WHAT REMAINS OF YOUR LIFE...

OR SPEND THE NEXT SIX MONTHS WAITING TO DIE.

SHALL WE SAY TOMORROW AT FIVE FOR YOUR COUNSELLING SESSION?

HMMM?

MISS FETTE?!!

PRIMROSE HILL.

UUUURRRGGH!

...TAKE ME WITH YOU, WEASEL. LET'S DIE TOGETHER...

LET ME SUCK IT, PLEEEAASSE!

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

NO, HE'S STILL PASSED OUT...

TO BE HONEST IT'S PROBABLY THE BEST THING FOR HIS CAREER, ANDREW.

THERE WAS ONLY SO LONG WE COULD KEEP MILKING THE TORTURED ARTIST CRAP WITHOUT THE SONGS TO BACK IT UP.

BIT OF LUCK HIS POWERS WILL BE MUSICAL... HE MIGHT ACTUALLY WRITE SOMETHING PEOPLE CAN PLAY WITHOUT CRINGING AFTER HE'S GONE.

ARGHH!

JEESUS WEPT!

HEH! I HAD A TERRIBLE DREAM...

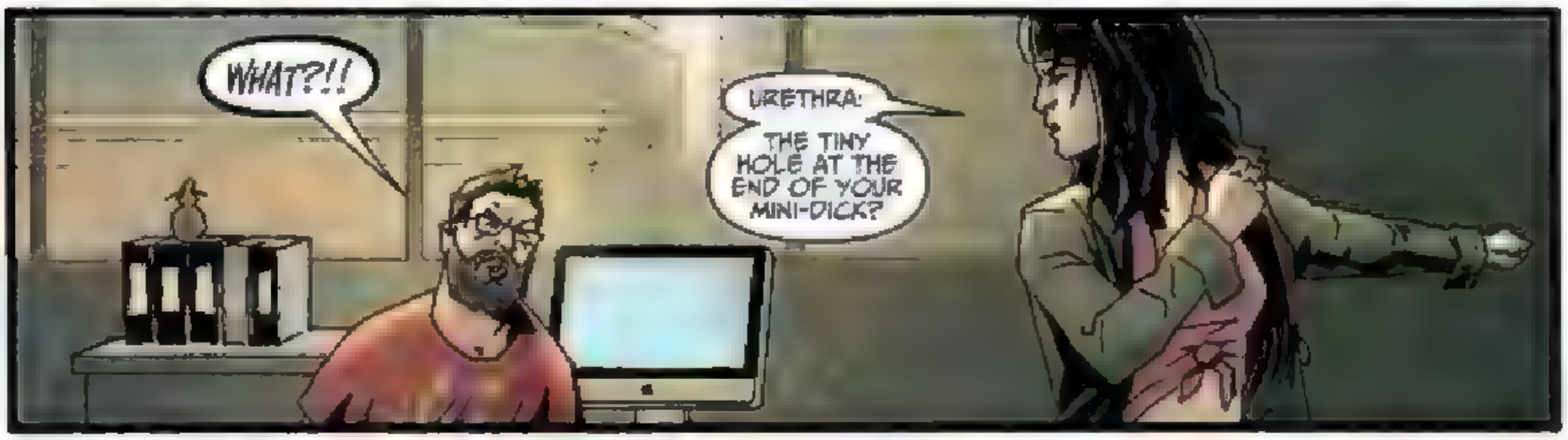
POSITIVE G+ VIRUS HEALTH SERVICES

SORRY, BRUV, THAT WAS THE RECORD COMPANY SENDING THEIR DEEPEST SYMPATHY.

THE STORY'S BREAKING IN THE TABLOIDS TOMORROW. IT'S GONNA BE *HUGE!*

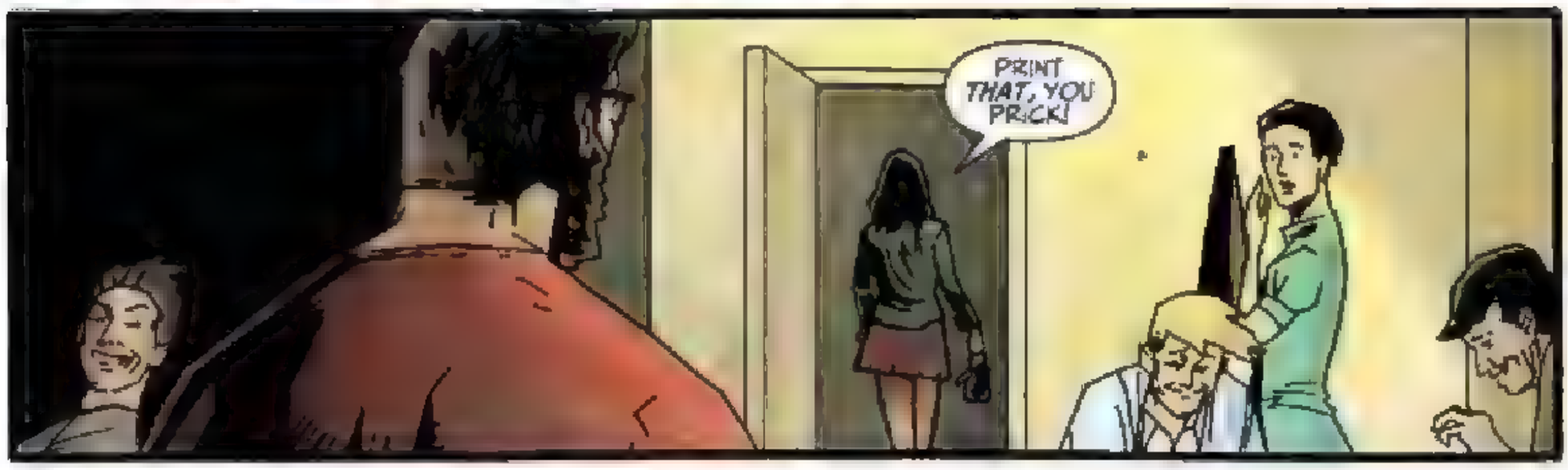
YOU KNOW THEY'RE EAGER FOR ALL SIX ALBUMS BEFORE YOU PASS ON?

SIX?!!
I KNOW. AT YOUR CURRENT PRODUCTIVITY THAT'S OVER 180 YEARS OF WORK.
BJT ONCE YOUR ENHANCEMENTS DEVELOP IT COULD BE A REALLY CREATIVE TIME FOR YOU.
YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A SERIOUS ARTIST. MAYBE THIS IS YOUR CHANCE?
TRY NOT TO PISS IT AWAY...
BRICE, THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO -
SO WHAT DO I PRINT, SUGARTITS?
THINK YOU CAN JUST SWAN OUT?!
WHERE THE HELL IS MY GODDAMN ARTWORK?!!!
:SNIFF:
YOU KNOW WHAT...
WHY DON'T YOU STICK YOUR FUCKING ARTWORK RIGHT UP YOUR URETHRA?


WHAT?!!
URETHRA:
THE TINY HOLE AT THE END OF YOUR MINI-DICK?

MY MINI...
WHAT DID YOU SAY TO ME?!!
DICK.. THE THING YOU POLISH EVERY NIGHT WHILE REMEMBERING THE ONE TIME YOU NEARLY TOUCHED A LADY, NAKED?!

THE THING YOU'VE HAD UP YOUR ASS SINCE PUBERTY? THE THING THAT SWELLS TO ITS MAXIMUM CAPACITY OF TWO INCHES WHENEVER YOU FIRE PEOPLE!
THE THING EVERY GIRL HERE WOULD LIKE TO CUT OFF FOR ALL THE LEERING AND PAWING WHEN WE WORK LATE!
OH, AND JUST TO BE CLEAR - THE DOG HAIR AND BITS OF LUNCH IN YOUR BEARD DO NOT MAKE FOR AN ATTRACTIVE COLOGNE.
WHU...?!
STICK YOUR SHITTY JOB UP YOUR TINY PISSHOLE!


PRINT THAT, YOU PRICK!

SOUTH BANK:
SO...MANLY HAND-SHAKE, WALK RIGHT ON... IN THE WORDS OF KING GEORGE 'WHAT, WHAT! AND THERE IT IS...'
I'M SURE WE'RE ALL STIRRED BY YOUR POSITIVE ATTITUDE, MONTY --
BUT WHAT PEOPLE AT HOME WILL WANT TO KNOW IS...HOW'S IT AFFECTED YOUR SEX LIFE?
HA HA! WELL...APPARENTLY, CHECKING OUT IN MERE MONTHS INFUSES MY DEMEANOUR WITH A NOBLE HEROISM WHICH IS THOROUGHLY UNDESERVED.
PICTURE ME BRAVELY FIGHTING BACK THE TEARS COMFORTED ONLY BY THE TITS IN MY FACE AND EAGER HARPIES DROOLING ONTO MY LOINS.
I SOLDIER BRAVELY ON!
SERIOUSLY?
I TELLS YA--HEF WOULD CREAM HIS PANTS FOR A SNIFF OF ME SLOPPY SECONDS!
BUT SURELY YOU --
NEEDLESS TO SAY I PRACTICE-- NAY, INSIST UPON-- SAFE SEX AND ALL PARTIES ARE FULLY AWARE OF MY MEDICAL STATUS BEFORE THE DANCE OF LOVE BEGINS.

BUSINESS AS USUAL?
IN EVERY WAY. I'M A COMEDIAN. A LOVER. A HUMANITARIAN. THIS JUST MAKES ME WANT TO BRING TWICE THE INTENSITY TO MY ART. I'LL WEEP WHEN I'M DEAD.
INSPIRATIONAL!
AFTER THE BREAK, MORE ON MONTY'S HOPES FOR THE FUTURE AND THE G-PLUS VIRUS...
THREE MINUTES.
GREAT STUFF, MONTY.
BET HER KNICKER-BACON'S A BIT CRISPY...
WHO... IN THE HABIT?!
SEXY GETUP! Y'KNOW... I'VE NEVER DINED FROM THE HOLY PLATE!
UM.. DON'T FANCY YOUR CHANCES, MATE.
SERIOUSLY... WHAT'VE I GOT TO LOSE?

PRIMROSE HILL:

SOMETIMES I WAKE IN MY OWN PISS...

SOMETIMES SURROUNDED BY GAK AND GROUPIES --

LATELY I'VE BEEN HAVING TROUBLE WITH NOTH'N' BEING WHERE IT SHOULD...

...LIKE MY LEGS AND THE FLOOR.

BUT THIS...

CLANG

WHUUU...?!!

...IS A NEW ONE.

DON'T TELL ME...I TAKE THE RED PILL AND YOU SHOW ME HOW DEEP MY RABBIT HOLE GOES?

VERY FUNNY, SHITHEAD. BUT THE TIME FOR JOKES IS MOTHERFUCKIN' OVER.

IN THAT CASE... WHY ARE YOU WEARIN' MY MUM'S COAT?!

ARGHH! ARGGGHHH!

REALLY??!!! ARGGHH!!! JEEZUS H FUCK!
YOU DEALIN' WIV DANGEROUS PEOPLE, BATTYBOY. PEOPLE YOU OWE!
WE TOLERATED YOUR FLAKY ASS WHEN YOU HAD A FUTURE - BUT SHIT'S CHANGED!
ARGGHH! SO'S FASHION --
-HNGG- CHECK...THE MIRROR!
JEEZUS!!!
TTTT TTT!
KNOW WHAT...?
I'M GONNA SLICE OUT YOUR EYES AND FUCK THE SOCKETS.
WHAT TH --?!
FUCKOH FUCKOHFUCK OHFUCKOH FUCK.

I FEEL AN OVERWHELMING SENSE OF, LIKE, *WRONGNESS* —

HANGING OVER THE CITY - TAKIN' IN THE NEW PERSPECTIVE...

THINKIN' WHAT A GREAT SONG THIS WOULD'VE MADE.

THEN I'M, LIKE, FALLING...

THE SICK CERTAINTY OF THE DEATH RUSHING TOWARD ME - FEARFULLY FAST.

I'M THINKIN' OF MY MUM WHAT A FRAUD I AM THE TUNES I AN'T WRITTEN THE FIRST G RL I KISSED AND HOW NOTHING REALLY MATTERED DID IT?

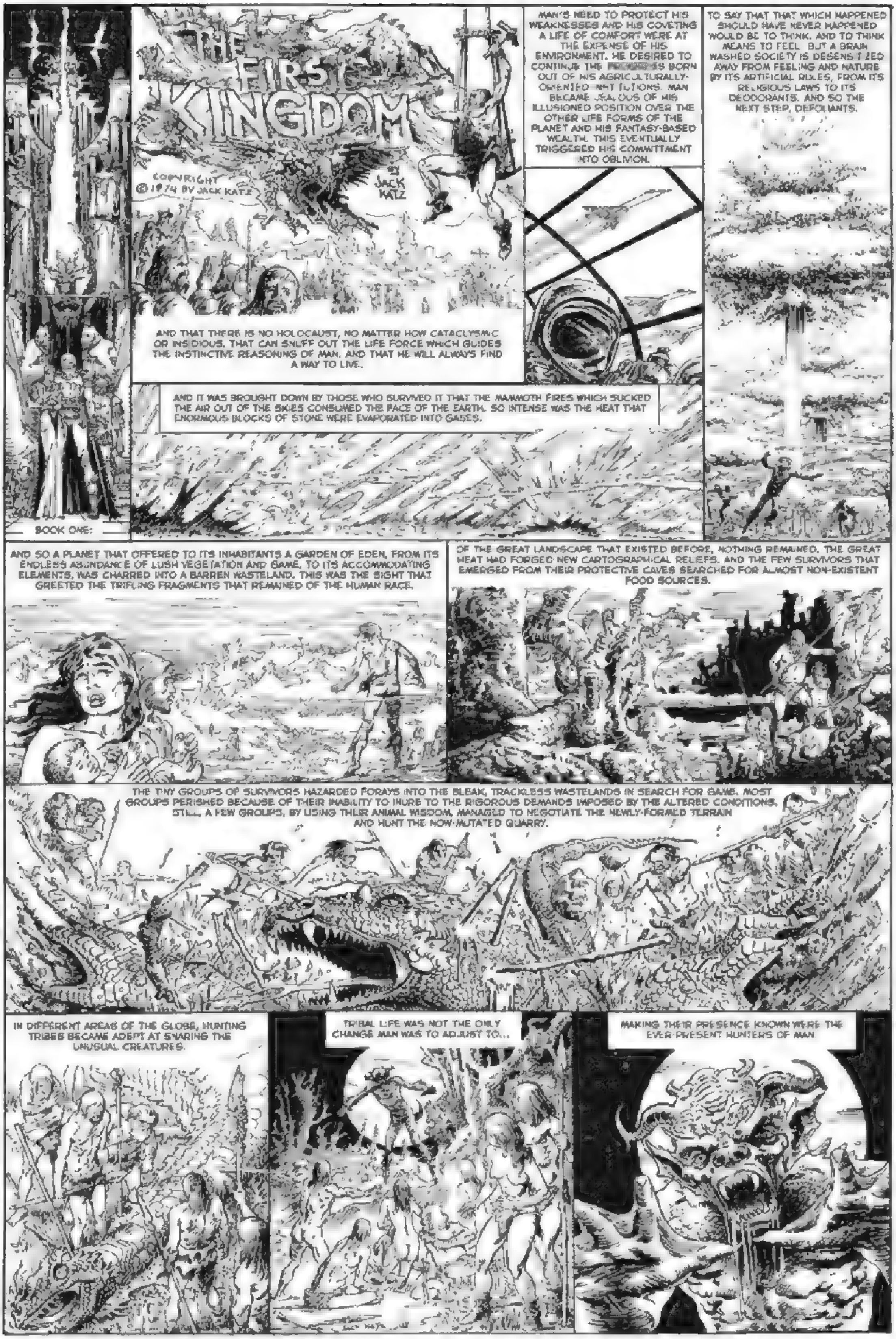
I SEE MY NECK SNAP - SKULL SHATTERING BRAIN MULCH - AND A COLD WET FINALITY

MY BOWELS EVACUATE!

I DON'T WANT TO DIE!

I DESPERATELY WANT THE FLOOR NOT TO BE THERE!

SO IT'S NOT!
EARTH BLINDS ME
CABLES FIZZ AS THEY WHIP THROUGH ME.
THRASHING AROUND --
SUFFOCATING--
BURIED ALIVE --
DESPERATE FOR AIR--
I MOVE UP --
-- SEARCHING FOR LIGHT!
YES!!!
HAHAHA HAHA!
WHAT A FUCKIN' TRIP!!!


BOOK ONE:
THE FIRST KINGDOM
COPYRIGHT ©1974 BY JACK KATZ
BY JACK KATZ
MAN'S NEED TO PROTECT HIS WEAKNESSES AND HIS COVETING A LIFE OF COMFORT WERE AT THE EXPENSE OF HIS ENVIRONMENT. HE DESIRED TO CONTINUE THE PROGRESS BORN OUT OF HIS AGRICULTURALLY-ORIENTED INSTITUTIONS. MAN BECAME JEALOUS OF HIS ILLUSIONED POSITION OVER THE OTHER LIFE FORMS OF THE PLANET AND HIS FANTASY-BASED WEALTH. THIS EVENTUALLY TRIGGERED HIS COMMITMENT INTO OBLIVION.
TO SAY THAT THAT WHICH HAPPENED SHOULD HAVE NEVER HAPPENED WOULD BE TO THINK. AND TO THINK MEANS TO FEEL. BUT A BRAIN WASHED SOCIETY IS DESENSITIZED AWAY FROM FEELING AND NATURE BY ITS ARTIFICIAL RULES, FROM ITS RELIGIOUS LAWS TO ITS DEODORANTS. AND SO THE NEXT STEP, DEFOLIANTS.
AND THAT THERE IS NO HOLOCAUST, NO MATTER HOW CATACLYSMIC OR INSIDIOUS, THAT CAN SNUFF OUT THE LIFE FORCE WHICH GUIDES THE INSTINCTIVE REASONING OF MAN, AND THAT HE WILL ALWAYS FIND A WAY TO LIVE.
AND IT WAS BROUGHT DOWN BY THOSE WHO SURVIVED IT THAT THE MAMMOTH FIRES WHICH SUCKED THE AIR OUT OF THE SKIES CONSUMED THE FACE OF THE EARTH. SO INTENSE WAS THE HEAT THAT ENORMOUS BLOCKS OF STONE WERE EVAPORATED INTO GASES.
AND SO A PLANET THAT OFFERED TO ITS INHABITANTS A GARDEN OF EDEN, FROM ITS ENDLESS ABUNDANCE OF LUSH VEGETATION AND GAME, TO ITS ACCOMMODATING ELEMENTS, WAS CHARRED INTO A BARREN WASTELAND. THIS WAS THE SIGHT THAT GREETED THE TRIFLING FRAGMENTS THAT REMAINED OF THE HUMAN RACE.
OF THE GREAT LANDSCAPE THAT EXISTED BEFORE, NOTHING REMAINED. THE GREAT HEAT HAD FORGED NEW CARTOGRAPHICAL RELIEFS. AND THE FEW SURVIVORS THAT EMERGED FROM THEIR PROTECTIVE CAVES SEARCHED FOR ALMOST NON-EXISTENT FOOD SOURCES.
THE TINY GROUPS OF SURVIVORS HAZARDED FORAYS INTO THE BLEAK, TRACKLESS WASTELANDS IN SEARCH FOR GAME. MOST GROUPS PERISHED BECAUSE OF THEIR INABILITY TO INURE TO THE RIGOROUS DEMANDS IMPOSED BY THE ALTERED CONDITIONS. STILL, A FEW GROUPS, BY USING THEIR ANIMAL WISDOM, MANAGED TO NEGOTIATE THE NEWLY-FORMED TERRAIN AND HUNT THE NOW-MUTATED QUARRY.
IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE GLOBE, HUNTING TRIBES BECAME ADEPT AT SHARING THE UNUSUAL CREATURES.
TRIBAL LIFE WAS NOT THE ONLY CHANGE MAN WAS TO ADJUST TO...
MAKING THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN WERE THE EVER-PRESENT HUNTERS OF MAN.

THE GIANT OGRE-ON CARNIVORA WOULD INVARIABLY MAKE FAST WORK OF THE POORLY-GUARDED [redacted] AND THEIR PUNY DEFENDERS.

OCCASIONALLY, A FEW BANDS OF HUNTERS WOULD ABANDON THEIR PERPETUAL MISTRUST OF EACH OTHER AND UNITE FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF TRACKING AND DISPATCHING OF THE MAN BEASTS.

BUT ANIMAL CUNNING OCCUPIES THE BODIES THAT STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

EVEN GREATER PREDATORS TRAVERSED THE LAND MASSES OF THE PLANET WHOSE MEMORY HAD FALLEN INTO STYGIAN OBLIVION.

MANY CONTESTS FOR THE GAME REGIONS WERE NOT FOUGHT BY MAN.

AS THE HUNTING ALLIES SOPHISTICATED IN THE ART OF SURVIVAL, A REGENERATION OF CUSTOMS FORGOTTEN BY THE REMNANTS OF A ONCE GREAT CIVILIZATION, THEY RE ENACTED MANY RITUALS WHICH FED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR ANCESTORS' INSTITUTIONS.

PLAIN HUNTERS FEAR NO CARADOC.
PLAIN HUNTERS FEAR NO CARADOC.

PLAIN HUNTERS FEAR NO CARADOC.
PLAIN HUNTERS FEAR NO CARADOC.

INEVITABLY, HUNTING PARTIES WOULD CONFRONT EACH OTHER WHEN SEEKING AFTER THE SAME GAME.

INCESSANT CLASHES FOR THE GAME PRESERVES WERE COMMONPLACE. IT WAS NOT UNUSUAL THAT THE MALE POPULATION OF A WHOLE TRIBE WAS WIPED OUT.

FOR THE VICTOR, LIFE WAS, FOR THE RIGOROUS EXISTENCE THAT IT WAS, VERY SWEET.

SOME GROUPS BEGAN TO WANDER, IN AN EFFORT TO FIND SOME SURCEASE FROM THE CONTINUAL HARASSMENT WITH THEIR NEAR-NEIGHBOURS.

THOUGH INITIATED BY THE DESIRE TO ESCAPE THE CONTINUAL CLASHES OVER HUNTING GROUNDS, THE WANDERING OF THE TRIBES BECAME A SORT OF RELEASE FROM THE CONFINEMENT OF THE STAID EXISTENCE IMPOSED UPON THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR EARLY FEAR OF THE POSSIBLE DANGERS THAT COULD CONFRONT THEM IN THE UNKNOWN REGIONS. THE EXPLORING OF NEW TERRITORIES BECAME A WAY OF LIFE.

AMONG THE STRANGE NEW LIFE FORMS WHICH CAME TO THE NOTICE OF THE MIGRATING COLONIES WERE TINY MAN-LIKE CREATURES. THEY WERE, FOR THE MOST PART, GENTLE, AND WERE ADOPTED AS MASCOTS. THEIR CAPACITY TO ANTICIPATE DANGER WAS INDISPENSABLE DURING THE EXPLORATORY TREKS ACROSS THE LAND MASSES.

EVENTUALLY, THE DIVERGENT BANDS OF HUNTERS DECIDED UPON THE BEST AREAS WHICH WOULD PROVIDE BOTH FOR THEIR SECURITY AND SOURCE OF SUSTENANCE. ONE LARGE GROUP SETTLED ON THE HIGH PLATEAUS OF ETERNAL FIRE.

SOME MADE A PERMANENT RESIDENCE OUT OF THE MASSIVE SWAMP REGIONS

BY CHANCE, ONE GROUP CAME UPON A GREAT BODY OF WATER.

THEY USED THE SEA AS A SOURCE FOR FOOD, BUT THEY ALSO FEARED IT BECAUSE OF THE TERRIBLE CREATURES THAT LIVED IN IT. THE ONE THING THEY DID NOT DARE TO DO WAS TO VENTURE A CROSSING TO HAZARD WHAT MIGHT LIE BEYOND.

AFTER PASSING BUT A SHORT DISTANCE INTO THE SWAMP, IT BECAME ALIVE WITH ACTIVITY. MYRIAD FORMS OF LIFE BEGAN TO DISPLAY THEMSELVES. HE HAD FOUND THE GAME HE HAD BEEN SEEKING. ALSO, THIS PLACE WHICH HAD HELD SO MUCH FEAR FOR HIM, NOW FILLED HIM WITH A NEW YEARNING, THE DESIRE TO EXPLORE. AND THIS, INSTEAD OF RETURNING TO HIS TRIBE WITH THE NEWS OF HIS FIND, HE MOVED DEEPER INTO THE CAVERNOUS VERDURE. FOR DAYS, HE MADE HIS WAY THROUGH THE MAZE, LIVING OFF THE SWAMP FAUNA AND SLEEPING WHEN HE COULD. A LIGHT FILTERED THROUGH THE LUSH VEGETATION, IT SEEMED TO BE EMBODIED IN THE FORCE THAT WAS GUIDING HIM. HE FOLLOWED IT THROUGH THE TRACKLESS MAZE, UNTIL...

LEADERSHIP AMONG THESE GAME HUNTING TRIBES CAME BY WAY OF HUNTING ABILITY, AS SKILLFUL WOODCRAFT PREVENTED AGAINST THE EVER PRESENT POSSIBILITY OF STARVATION.

AND AS IT HAD TO SO MANY TRIBES BEFORE, IN THE PLAINS REGION WHERE THE COALTAGS RESIDED, GAME BECAME SCARCE. TRIED AND TRUE WOODCRAFTMEN COULD FIND NO SPOOR TO TRAIL. WITHIN A FEW WEEKS THEY WERE NEAR STARVATION.

WHAT UNWORTHY CREATURE DARES TRANSGRESS THE SACRED WATERS OF INDREGAN?

DARKENMOOR, SON OF ONE OF THE BEST HUNTERS OF THE TRIBE, AND SOME OF THE OTHER YOUNG MEN, DECIDED AGAINST WAITING FOR THE ELDERS TO RETURN WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF NO QUARRY. THEY SET OUT EACH IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS IN THE HOPE OF FINDING GAME.

FAREWELL, MY MOTHER, MY SISTER. I SHALL NOT RETURN WITHOUT FOOD.

ON THE SECOND DAY OUT, DARKENMOOR CAME UPON THE EDGE OF A GREAT SWAMP. THEN, IN A LAST, DESPERATE EFFORT TO FIND GAME, HE FORCED AWAY HIS FEARS OF THIS UNFAMILIAR RAINFOREST, MADE A MAKE SHIFT RAFT, AND ENTERED IT.

WHILE STILL BEWILDERED BY THE STRANGE MANIFESTATIONS DISPLAYED BEFORE HIM, YOUNG DARKENMOOR IS AGAIN CONFRONTED.

SPEAK UP! OR DO PUNY CREATURES LIKE YOU HAVE NO TONGUES?

THE ORACLE'S INSULT IS THE CATALYST THAT FORGES THE NATURE OF DARKENMOOR'S REPLY.

I AM DARKENMOOR, HUNTER OF THE COALTAG TRIBE OF THE GREAT PLAINS.

AND MY TONGUE WILL SPEAK LONG AFTER YOU ARE DEAD, ANCIENT GHOST OF THE SWAMP.

YOUR PROFANE INSULTS WILL REWARD YOU WITH AN IMMEDIATE ENGAGEMENT WITH MY HORNADON, GUARDIAN OF OUR DOMINION YOU HAVE VIOLATED. HORNADON, TEACH HIM HUMILITY!

SOMETIMES, THE FATE OF A MAN IS TURNED ON A DECISION IN WHICH HIS IMPETUOUS ACTION AFFORDS HIM LITTLE ALTERNATIVE. SO DARKENMOOR IS PUT TO THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF SEEMINGLY-UNRELATED TESTS WHICH WILL DRAW FROM HIM EVERY MEASURE OF ABILITY THAT WILL DEVELOP HIM INTO THE BUILDER OF THE FIRST KINGDOM.

THE HORNADON'S GRIP IS LIKE THAT OF THE ROOTS OF A TREE. DOWNWARD, EVER DOWNWARD, THE TWO COMBATANTS STRUGGLE, WHILE THE ICY WATERS ALMOST PARALYZE THE YOUNG WARRIOR.

AND ALL THE WHILE, DARKENMOOR, LOOKING DESPERATELY FOR A WAY TO RID HIMSELF OF HIS FOE, FINDS THAT OPPORTUNITY IN THE FORM OF A NATURAL OBSTACLE.

AND VICTORY OVER THE HORNADON IS AFFORDED TO DARKENMOOR BY THE VERY OAR WHICH HELPED HIM TO GAIN INGRESS INTO THE DARK DOMINION OF INDREGAN.

HERE IS YOUR PROTECTOR WHO WAS TO TEACH ME HUMILITY... IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO TEACH ME?

SUCH SARCASM FOR ONE SO YOUNG... YOUR VICTORY WILL ONLY BRING YOU TRAGEDY. BY THE TIME YOU RETURN WITH GAME FOR YOUR TRIBE, THEY WILL ALL BE DEAD. YOU ABANDONED THEM WHEN YOU LET YOUR CURIOSITY OF MY SACRED DOMAIN OVERCOME THE NEED OF YOUR TRIBE. BECAUSE OF YOUR TRANSGRESSION, I USED YOUR PRIDE TO DELAY YOU EVEN FURTHER... SO THERE WOULD BE NO CHANCE FOR THEIR SURVIVAL.

YOU LIE! I WILL BRING BACK FOOD IN TIME TO SAVE MY TRIBE ... AND I WILL COME BACK AND KILL YOU!

COME BACK! YOU ARE LOST NOW. DO YOU REMEMBER THE DIRECTION FROM WHICH YOU CAME HERE? DO YOU THINK YOU CAN FIND YOUR WAY OUT OF MY LABYRINTH OF OBLIVION? I GIVE YOU LEAVE TO TRY. YES, BY ALL MEANS, TRY!

WITH ANY LUCK, YOU WILL REMAIN HERE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. HA, HA, HA.

POSSESSED BY THE URGENCY TO UNDO WHAT HIS NEGLIGENCE MAY HAVE CAUSED, AND WITH THE WORDS OF THE ORACLE STILL ECHOING IN HIS EARS, DARKENMOOR FLEES INTO THE BOG.

BLIND TERROR DRIVES DARKENMOOR DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE ENDLESS, ALMOST IMPENETRABLE QUAGMIRE.

FINALLY, HOPELESSLY LOST, DARKENMOOR FALLS FROM EXHAUSTION.

THE GODS HAVE CHOSEN WELL. THE YOUNG HUNTER WILL MAKE A GREAT RULER OF THE FIRST KINGDOM.

YOU'RE WRONG, MY DAUGHTER. HE WILL ONLY LIVE TO REIGN UNTIL THE BIRTH OF HIS FIRSTBORN.

UPON AWAKENING, DARKENMOOR FINDS HIMSELF WITH AN UNWANTED COMPANION.

DRAWING FROM ALL THE SKILLS HE LEARNED WHILE HUNTING AT HIS FATHER'S SIDE, DARKENMOOR EVADES THE BEAST'S FIRST STRIKE.

STILL, THE CORAKNOT PERSISTS WITH IMPLACABLE DETERMINATION TO DEVOUR HIS PREY.

[illegible] RISKS A DESPERATE GAMBLE...

AND...

LATER, AS DARKENMOOR MOVES ALONG A CORRIDOR OF THE SWAMP HE HOPES WILL BRING HIM BACK TO THE PLAIN FROM WHICH HE CAME, HE BECOMES AWARE OF BEING FOLLOWED.

DO NOT STRIKE ME, DARKENMOOR. I OWE YOU MY LIFE.

THE CITY STATE OF CARBORUNDUM, WHERE THE NEWLY CROWNED BOY-KING RODERICK THE 37TH IS HAVING A LITTLE DIFFICULTY WITH THE SORCERER, NECROMANCER AND ALL ROUND BAD HAT, TO-ME KU-PA...
NO! THE DEAL'S OFF I TELL YOU!

BUT SIRE-- I KEPT MY SIDE OF THE BARGAIN!
YOU TRICKED ME!
I WOULDN'T SAY THAT, SIRE - YOU CAN HARDLY BLAME ME IF YOU DIDN'T READ THE SMALL PRINT IN OUR LITTLE AGREEMENT.
I SHALL RETURN IN SEVEN DAYS TO COLLECT WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY MINE-- OR I'LL DESTROY THE WHOLE TOWN!
IT'S YOUR CHOICE!
BE SEEING YOU!

GUARDS!

FETCH THE CHANCELLOR!

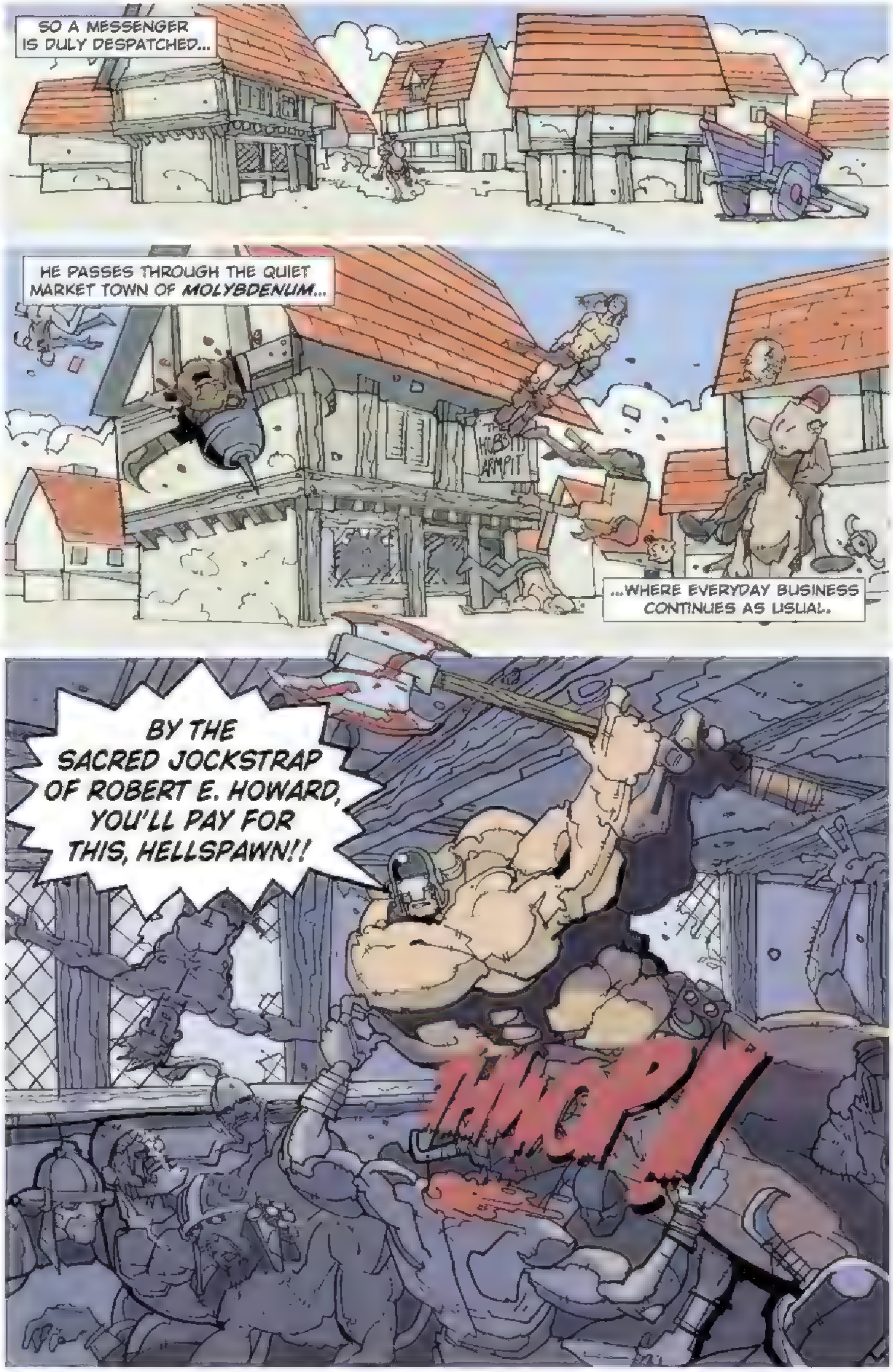
SO LET'S GET THIS STRAIGHT-- YOU DID A *DEAL* WITH THIS *ITINERANT WIZARD*-- IN RETURN FOR A *BUMPER HARVEST*, HE GETS TO COME BACK AND KEEP *EVERYTHING* FOR *HIMSELF*?

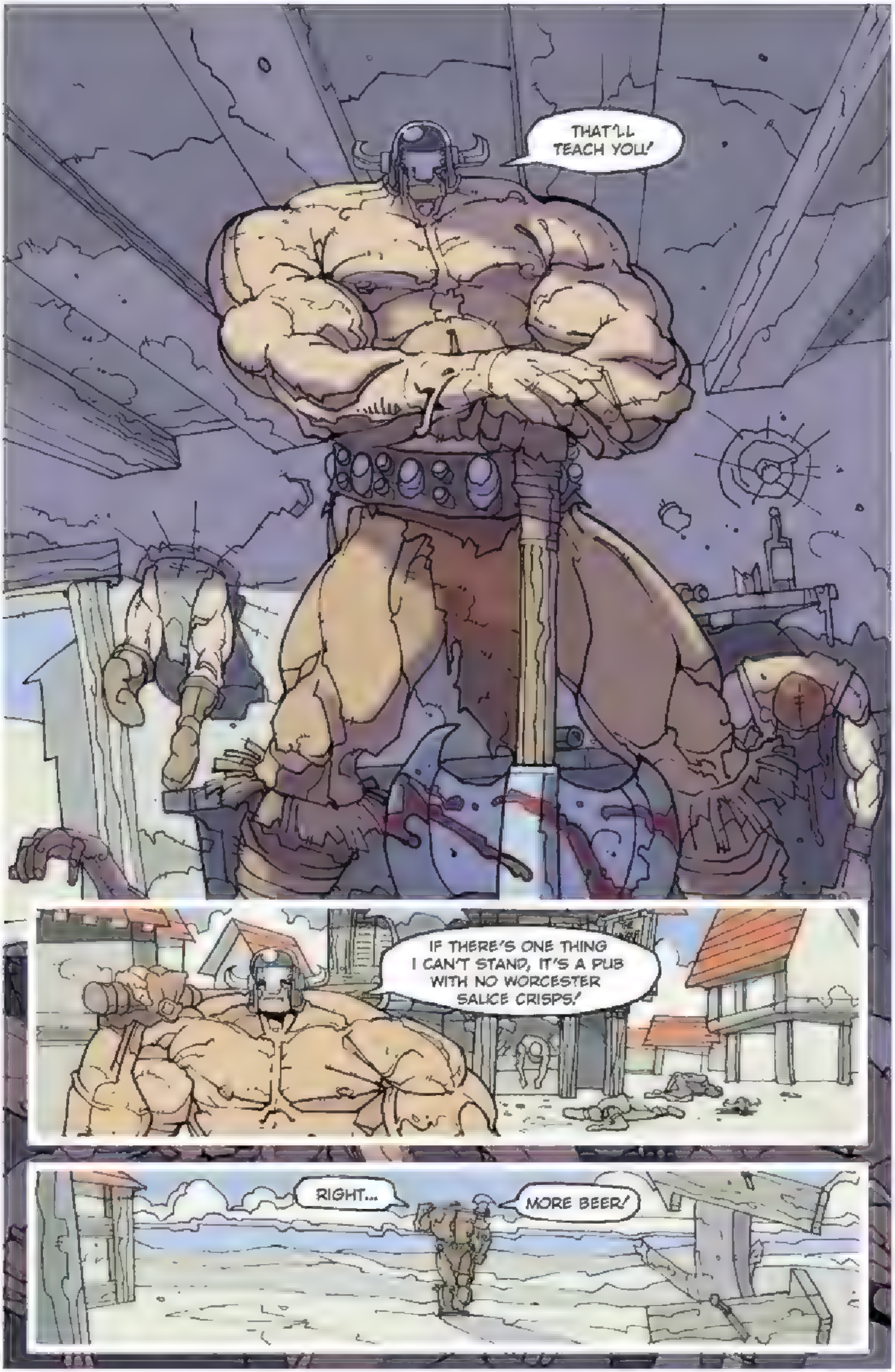
NOT QUITE...

...WE GET TO KEEP THE *TURNIPS*.

GREAT.

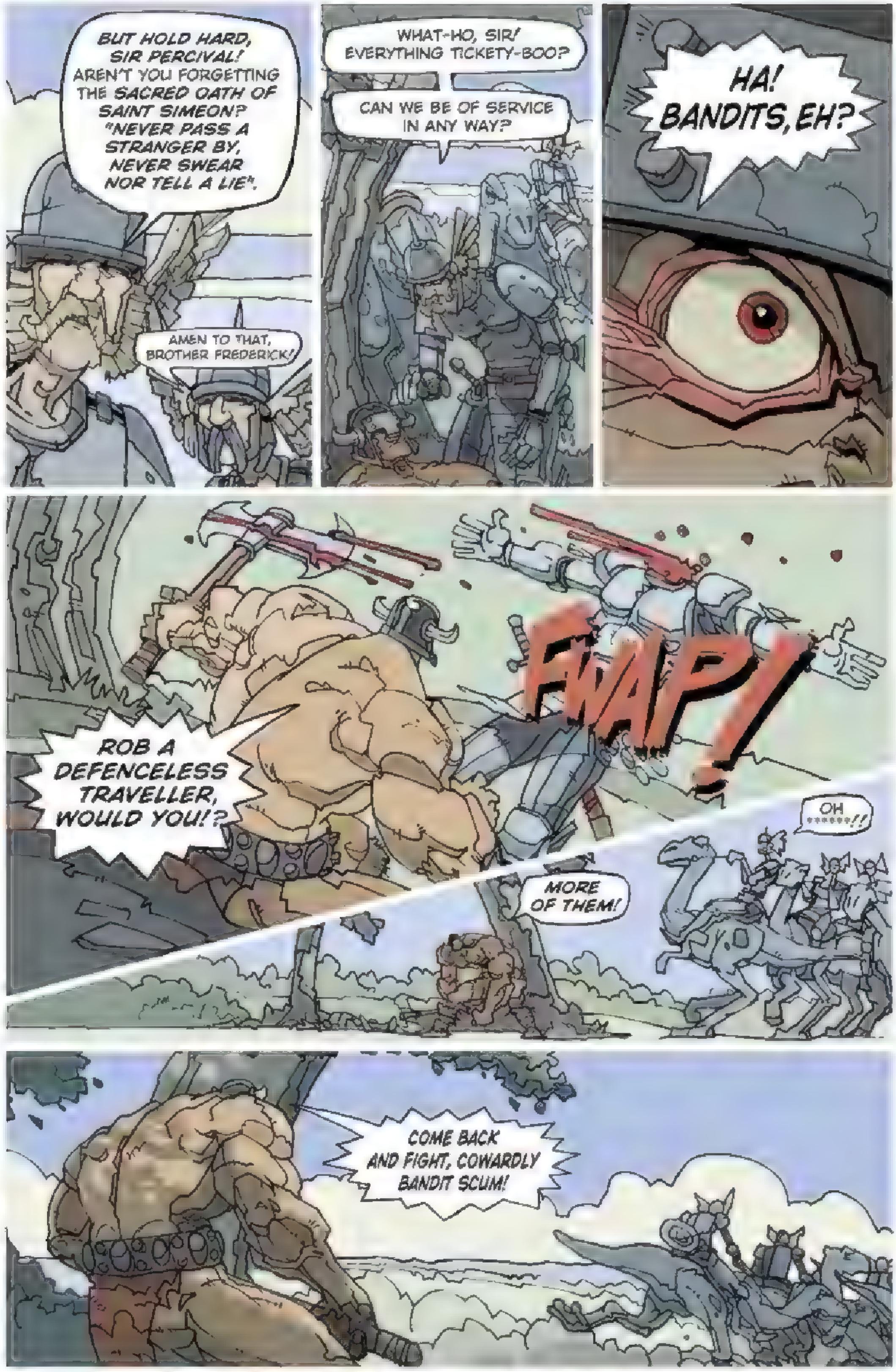
THERE'S ONLY ONE HOPE-- *THIS IS A JOB FOR SIR PERCIVAL PURSUIVANT AND THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN KNIGHTS OF SAINT SIMEON THE SAINTLY!*


SO A MESSENGER IS DULY DESPATCHED...
HE PASSES THROUGH THE QUIET MARKET TOWN OF *MOLYBDENUM*...
THE HUBB ARMPIT
...WHERE EVERYDAY BUSINESS CONTINUES AS USUAL.
BY THE SACRED JOCKSTRAP OF ROBERT E. HOWARD, YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, HELLSPAWN!!


THAT'LL TEACH YOU!
IF THERE'S ONE THING I CAN'T STAND, IT'S A PUB WITH NO WORCESTER SAUCE CRISPS!
RIGHT...
MORE BEER!

FINALLY, THE ENVOY'S MISSION IS ACCOMPLISHED.
ANOTHER TRIUMPH FOR THE KNIGHTS OF SAINT SIMEON THE SAINTLY!
HUSSAH!
AND LET'S HOPE MUFFIN DOESN'T GET STUCK AGAIN, EH, MOTHER TRELLIS?
SIRE, I BRING AN URGENT MESSAGE!
RIGHT, YOU CHAPS! SEEMS THEY'VE GOT INTO A TIGHT SPOT WITH SOME BALLY SMOKE AND MIRRORS JOHNNY OVER IN CARBORUNDUM!
WE'RE NEEDED AT THE DOUBLE!
ONWARD MEN! TO CARBORUNDUM!
HUSSAH!

BEFORE LONG, OUR HERO'S BUSY DAY TAKES ITS TOLL...
YAWN!
BUT HE'S NOT THE ONLY TRAVELLER ON THE ROAD...
TUM TIDDLE UMPTY-PUM
TUM TIDDLE UMPTY-PUM
I SAY, YOU FELLOWS! LOOK AT THIS POOR CHAP! WHAT'CHA SAY WE LEND HIM A HAND?
HE DOES SEEM A LITTLE ZONKED! BUT REMEMBER, FITZFFOULKES-- WE'RE EXPECTED IN CARBORUNDUM POST HASTE!


BUT HOLD HARD, SIR PERCIVAL! AREN'T YOU FORGETTING THE SACRED OATH OF SAINT SIMEON? "NEVER PASS A STRANGER BY, NEVER SWEAR NOR TELL A LIE".
AMEN TO THAT, BROTHER FREDERICK!
WHAT-HO, SIR! EVERYTHING TICKETY-BOO?
CAN WE BE OF SERVICE IN ANY WAY?
HA! BANDITS, EH?
ROB A DEFENCELESS TRAVELLER, WOULD YOU!?
FWAP!
OH ******!!
MORE OF THEM!
COME BACK AND FIGHT, COWARDLY BANDIT SCUM!

WASHINGTON, DC — 8:51 AM, JANUARY 20, 2009

CONGRESSMAN?

YES, YOUNG LADY?

JACOB and ESAU... THEY PLAY TOO MANY VIDEO GAMES, BUT THEY WORK HARD, THEY'RE GOOD BOYS--

KNOCK KNOCK

COME IN.

SIR, THEY'LL BE READY FOR YOU IN FIVE MINUTES.

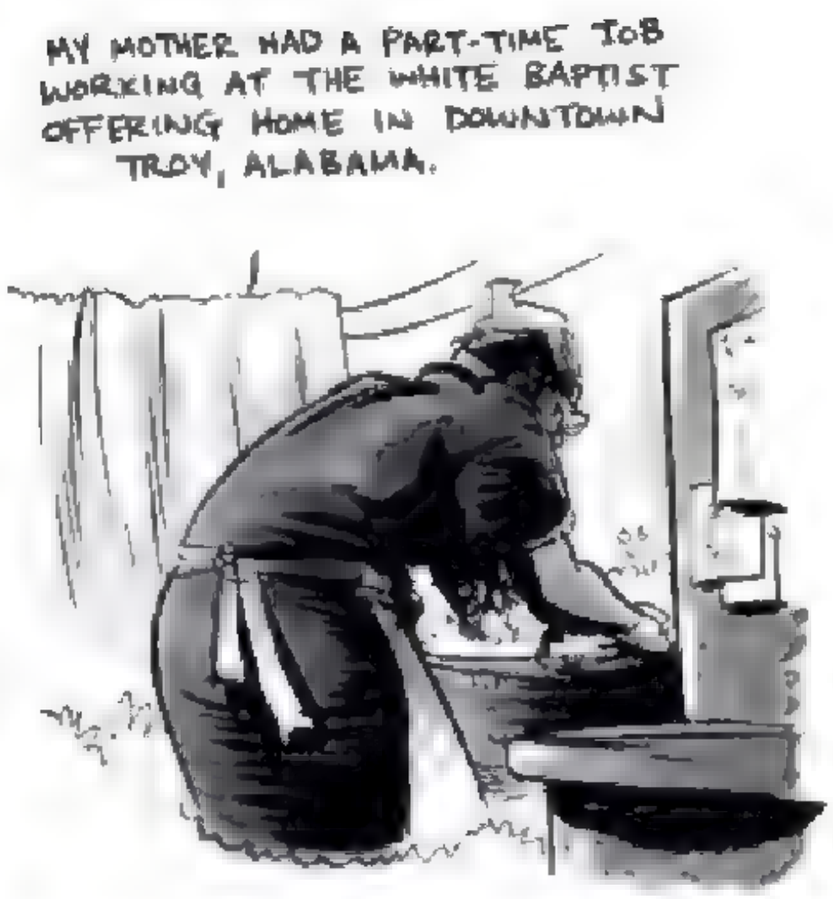
THANK YOU.

I'M REALLY VERY SORRY, WE'VE TAKEN UP SO MUCH OF YOUR TIME. WE SHOULD GET GOING.

NO, NO, PLEASE STAY -- WE STILL HAVE A LITTLE TIME. WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO ASK?

I GUESS, WELL -- SCHOOL.

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER HIGH SCHOOL? HOW DID YOU GO TO COLLEGE?
is that where you met Dr. King?
ha! well, YES and NO.
MY MOTHER HELPED ME GO TO COLLEGE...


MY MOTHER HAD A PART-TIME JOB WORKING AT THE WHITE BAPTIST OFFERING HOME IN DOWNTOWN TROY, ALABAMA.

ONE DAY AT WORK, SHE SAW A LITTLE PAPER PUBLISHED BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CONVENTION (which was all-white).

IT MENTIONED A SCHOOL IN NASHVILLE CALLED AMERICAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY THAT WAS JOINTLY SUPPORTED BY THE WHITE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND BLACK NATIONAL BAPTISTS.

ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, IT WAS A SCHOOL FOR BLACK MEN AND WOMEN TO STUDY TO BECOME MINISTERS OR MISSIONARIES-- AND IT OFFERED A WORK-STUDY PROGRAM ON CAMPUS.
APPLY HERE.

SO I APPLIED TO GO TO SCHOOL THERE,

AND WAS ACCEPTED,

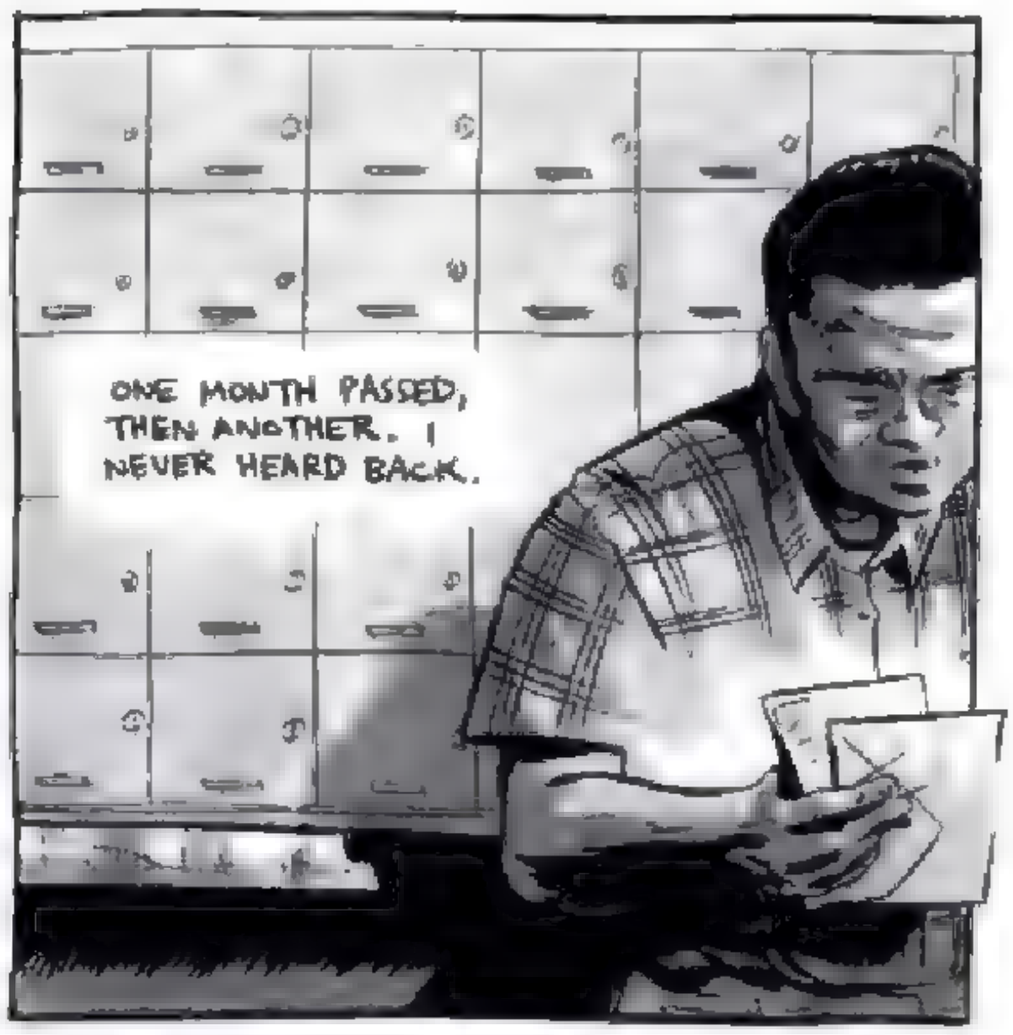
AND I GOT A JOB WASHING DISHES AND SERVING FOOD ON THE LINE.

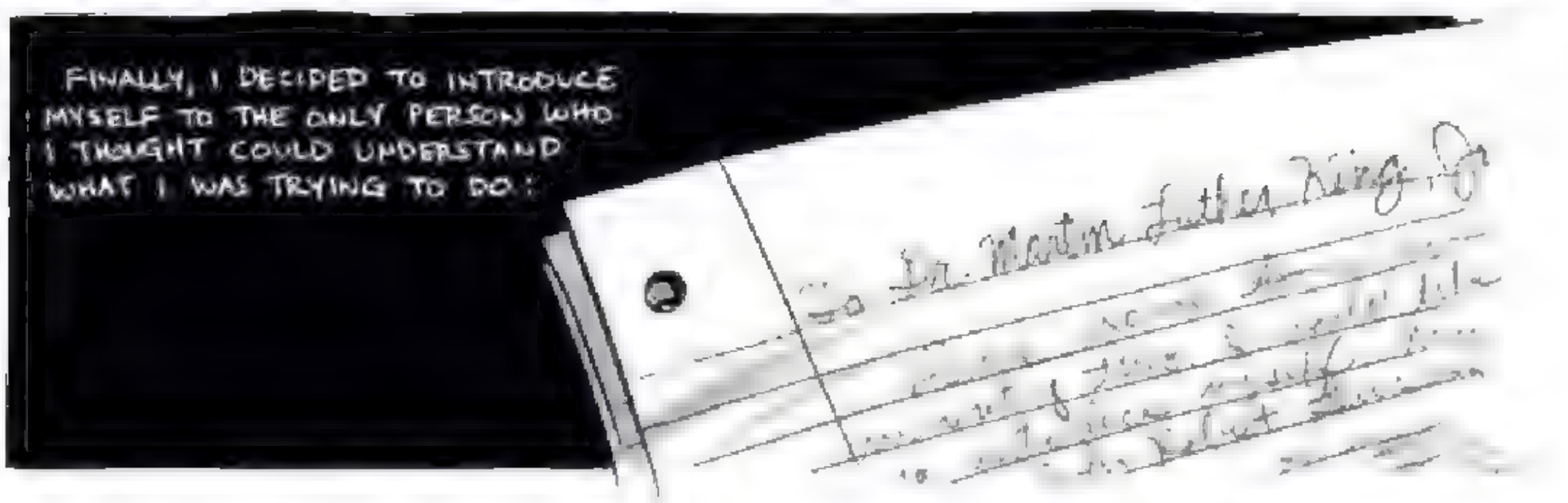
IT WASN'T GLAMOROUS,
BUT I GOT TO KNOW ALL THE FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND VISITORS. EVERYBODY NEEDS TO EAT.

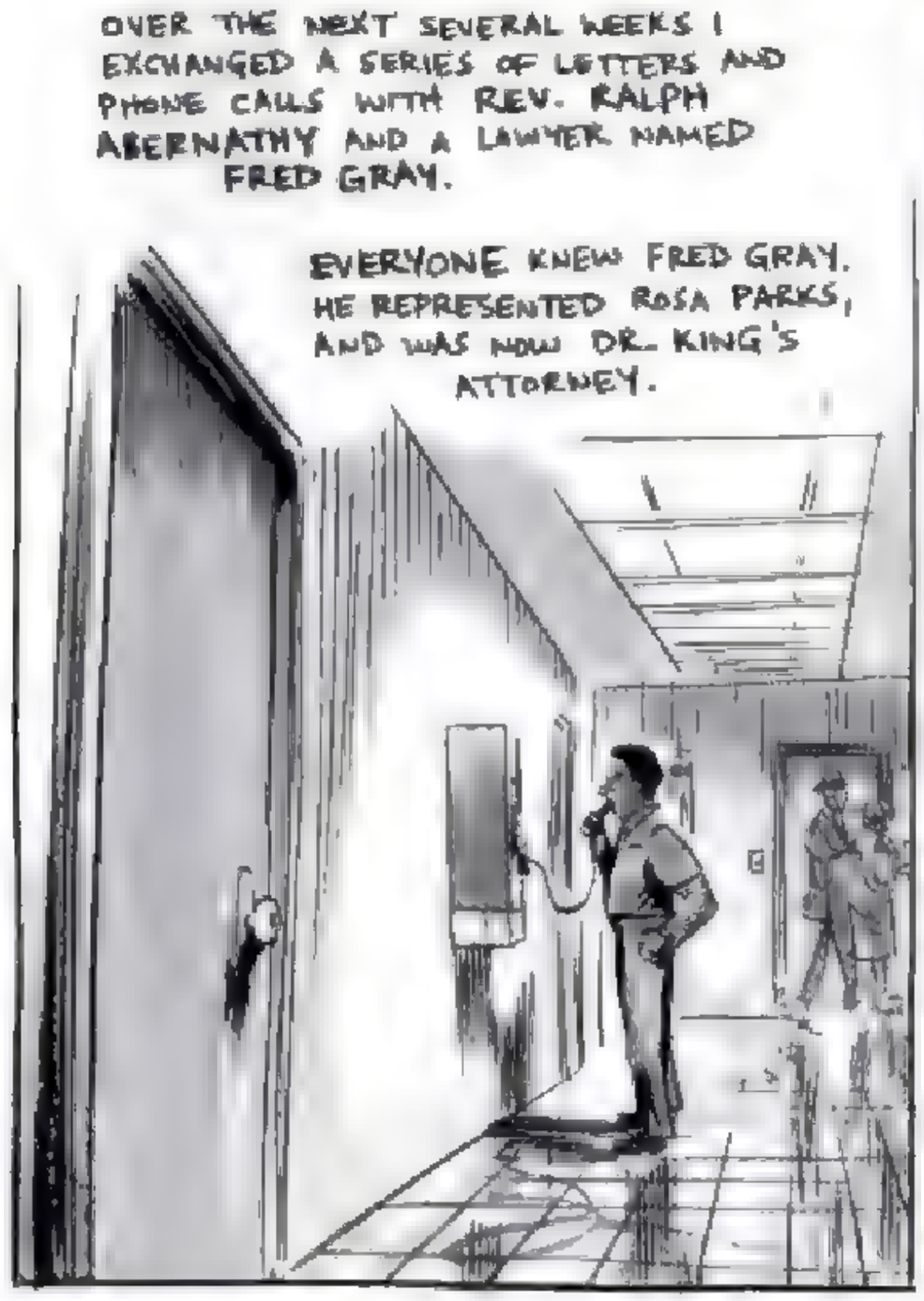
I LOVED THE NEW IDEAS COLLEGE WAS INTRODUCING ME TO, IN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY-- BUT I COULDN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT THE SOCIAL GOSPEL.
HERE I WAS READING ABOUT JUSTICE, WHEN THERE WERE BRAVE PEOPLE OUT THERE WORKING TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

I STARTED TO FEEL GUILTY FOR NOT DOING MORE. I BECAME RESTLESS.

I THOUGHT ABOUT TROY STATE, JUST A FEW MILES FROM MY PARENTS' HOME, WHERE NO BLACK STUDENT WAS ALLOWED.
SO I APPLIED AS A TRANSFER STUDENT.


ONE MONTH PASSED, THEN ANOTHER. I NEVER HEARD BACK.


FINALLY, I DECIDED TO INTRODUCE MYSELF TO THE ONLY PERSON WHO I THOUGHT COULD UNDERSTAND WHAT I WAS TRYING TO DO:
To Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.


OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS I EXCHANGED A SERIES OF LETTERS AND PHONE CALLS WITH REV. RALPH ABERNATHY AND A LAWYER NAMED FRED GRAY.
EVERYONE KNEW FRED GRAY. HE REPRESENTED ROSA PARKS, AND WAS NOW DR. KING'S ATTORNEY.

FINALLY, GRAY AND ABERNATHY WROTE TO TELL ME THAT DR. KING WANTED TO MEET ME.

ONE SATURDAY MORNING IN THE SPRING OF 1958, MY FATHER DROVE ME TO THE GREYHOUND BUS STATION AGAIN.

NEITHER OF US SAID A WORD.

I BOARDED A BUS, AND TRAVELED THE FIFTY MILES FROM TROY TO MONTGOMERY.

I'D NEVER SEEN A LAWYER BEFORE-- BLACK OR WHITE.

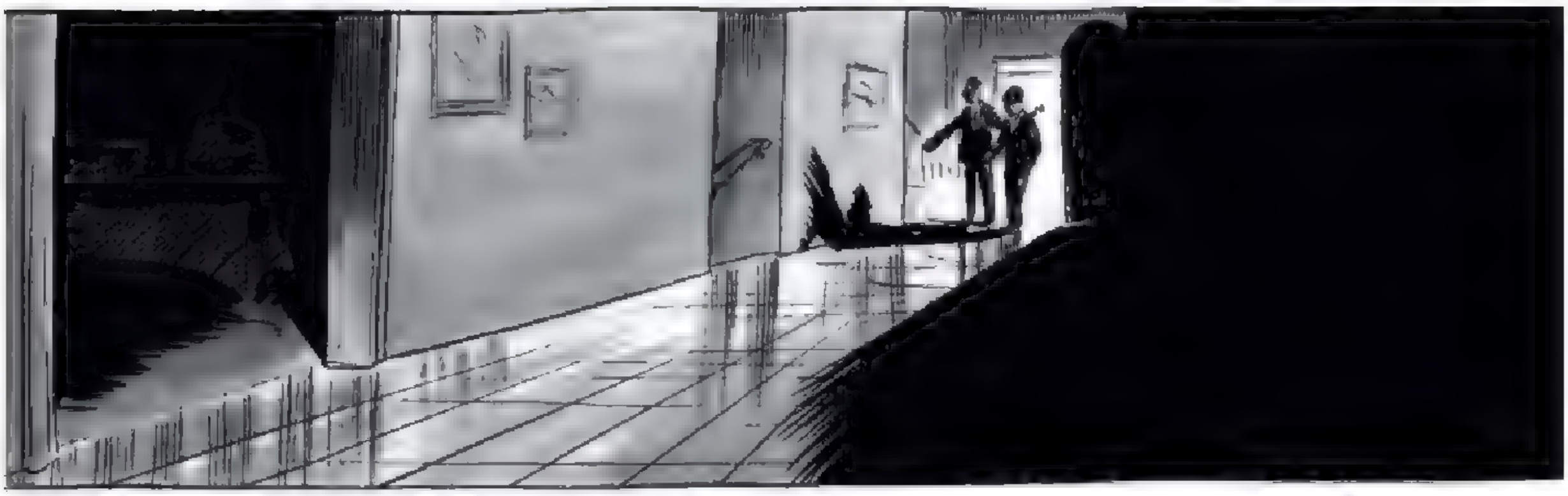
NOK NOK

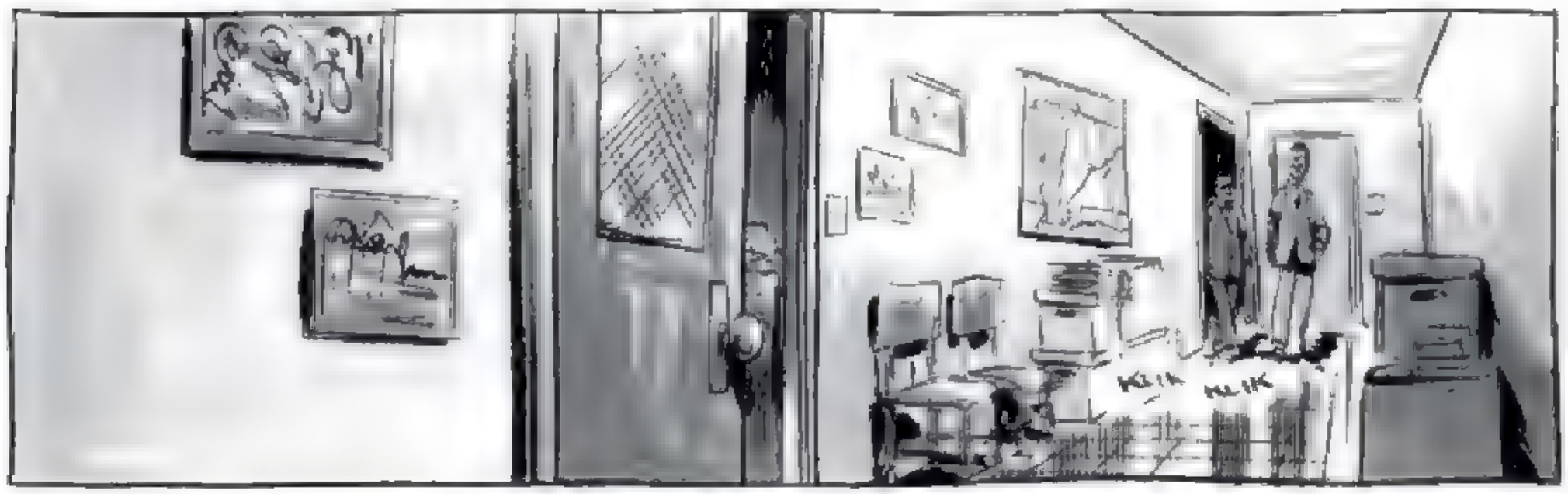
JOHN

AND I PRESUME YOU'RE JOHN LEWIS?

YES SIR. ATTORNEY GRAY?

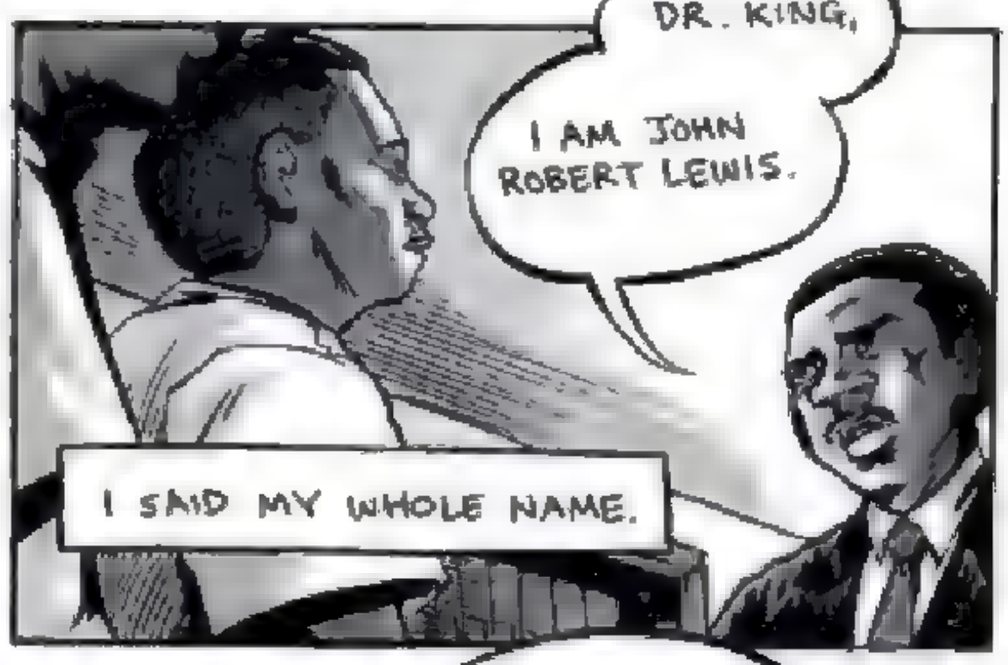
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO DRIVE OVER TO THE CHURCH.

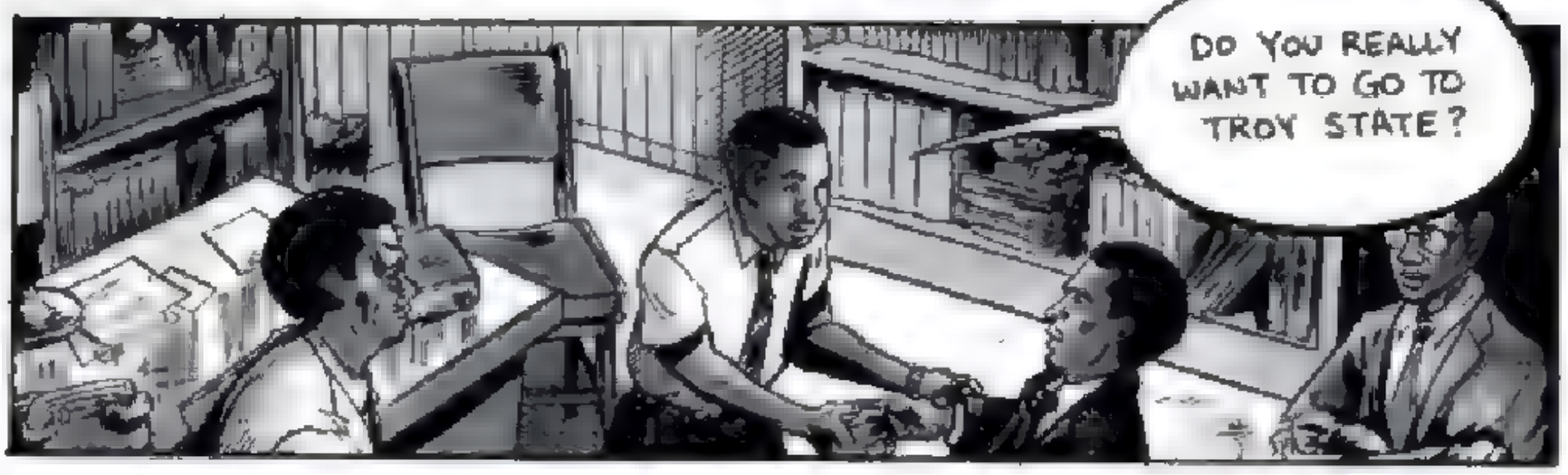



NOK NOK
NOK NOK
Come in!
SO--
ARE YOU THE BOY FROM TROY?
ARE YOU JOHN LEWIS?

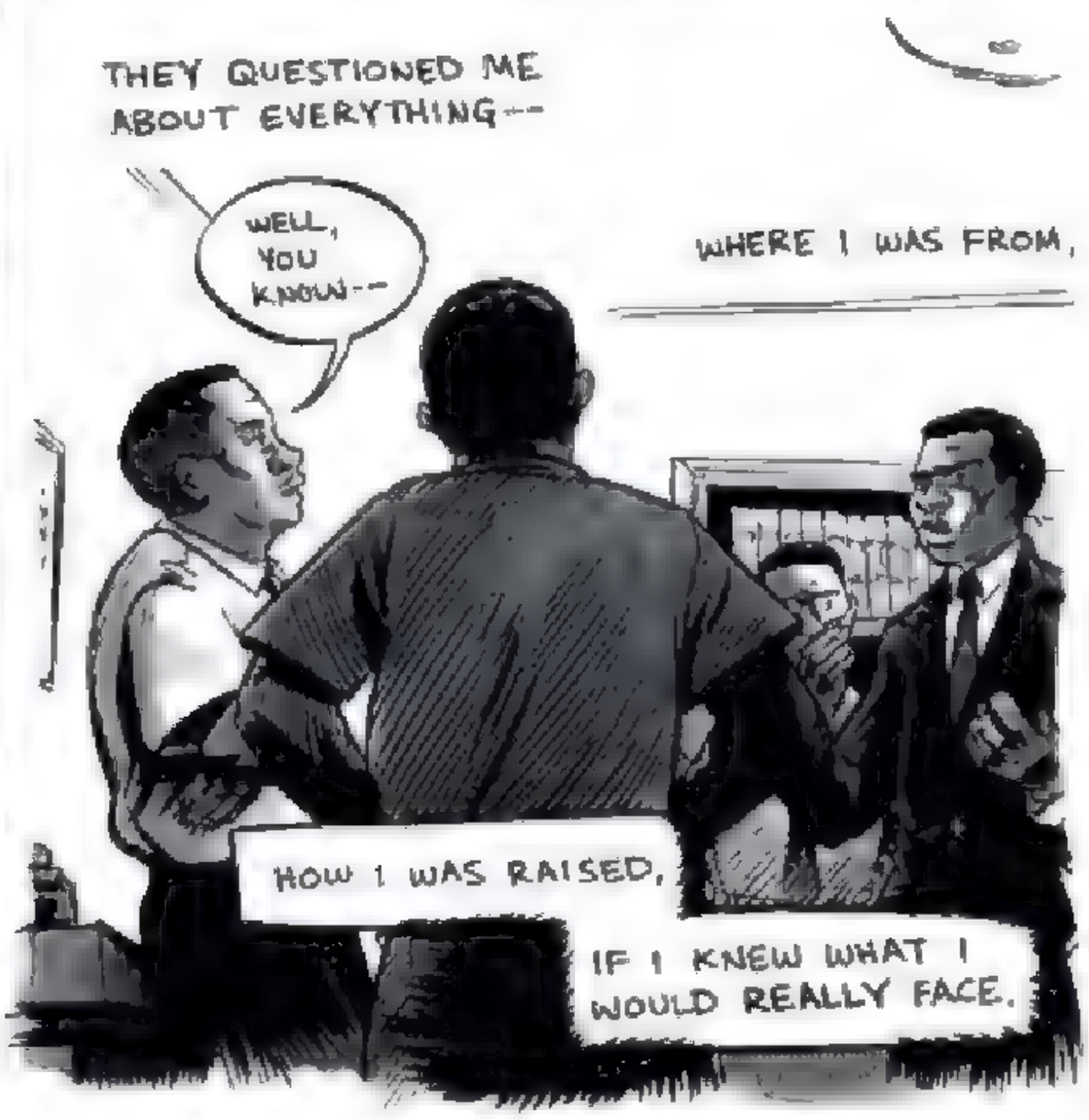
I JUST WANT TO MEET THE BOY FROM TROY.
I WAS SO SCARED.
DR. KING

WHO IS THIS YOUNG MAN WHO WANTS TO DESEGREGATE TROY STATE?
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR DO.

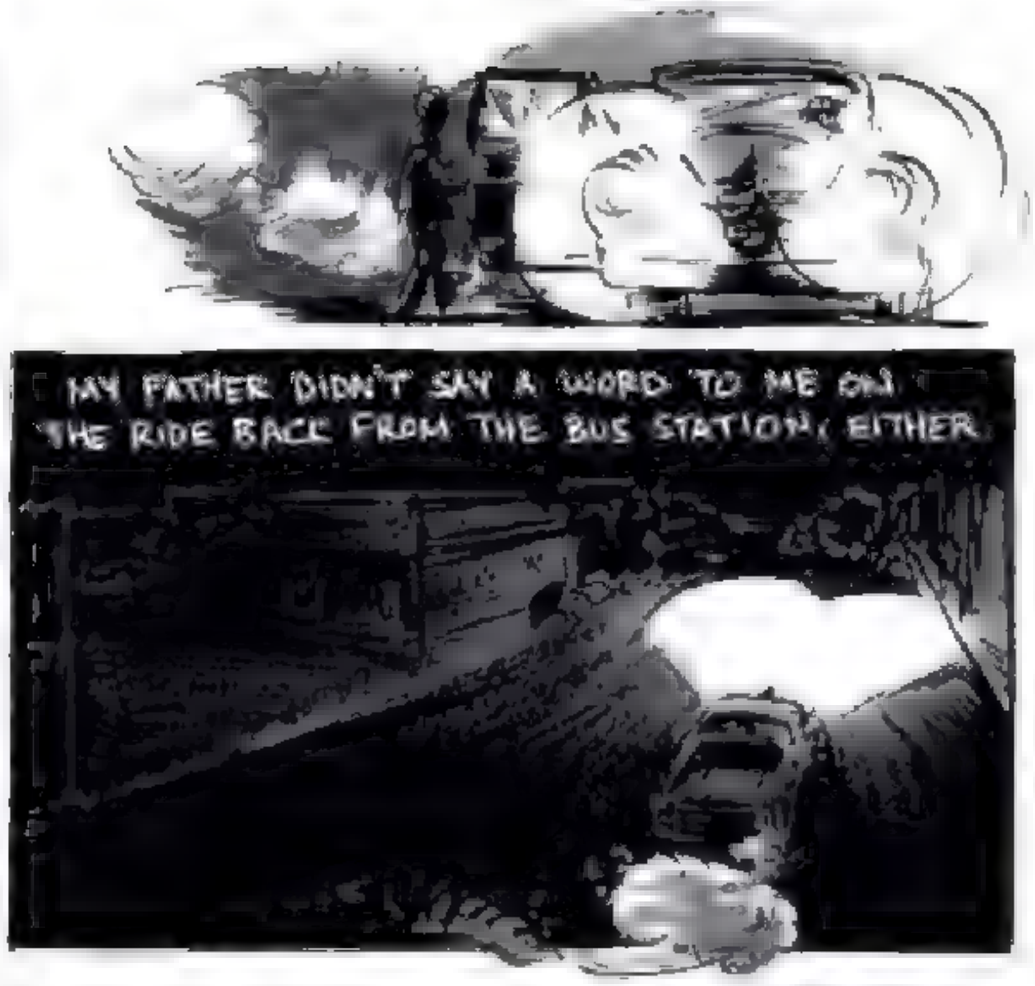

DR. KING,
I AM JOHN ROBERT LEWIS.
I SAID MY WHOLE NAME.

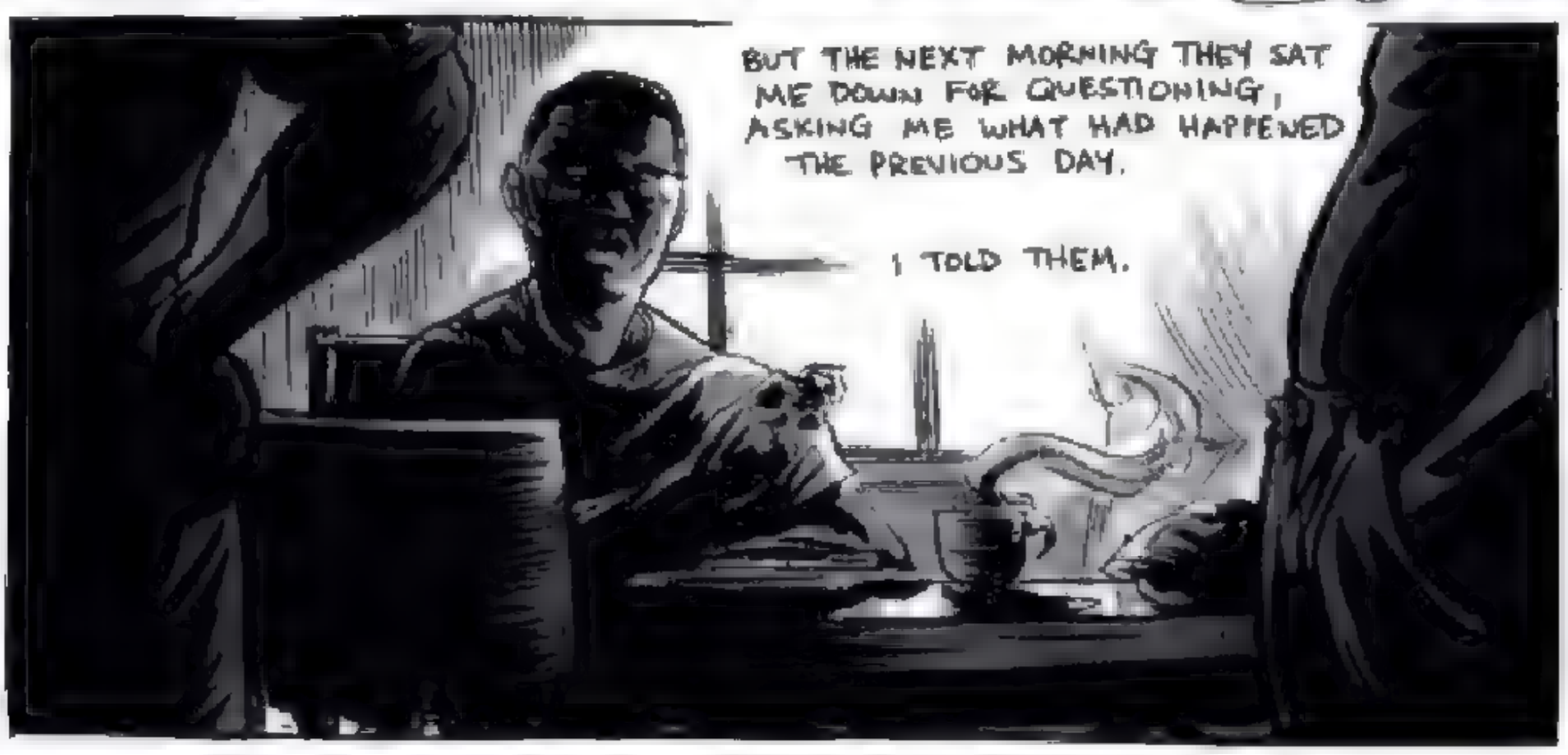

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO GO TO TROY STATE?

YES, DR. KING.
I WANT TO GO TO TROY STATE.


THEY QUESTIONED ME ABOUT EVERYTHING--
WELL, YOU KNOW--
WHERE I WAS FROM,
HOW I WAS RAISED,
IF I KNEW WHAT I WOULD REALLY FACE.

TO ATTEND TROY STATE, WE'LL HAVE TO SUE THE STATE OF ALABAMA AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.
YOU'RE NOT OLD ENOUGH TO FILE A SUIT-- YOU'LL HAVE TO GET YOUR PARENTS' OKAY.
THEY'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SIGN.
BUT IF YOU WANT TO GO, WE'LL HELP-- WE'LL RAISE THE MONEY TO FILE THOSE SUITS, AND WE'LL SUPPORT YOU ALL THE WAY.
BUT YOU MUST KEEP IN MIND--
YOUR PARENTS COULD LOSE THEIR JOBS. YOUR FAMILY HOME COULD BE BOMBED OR BURNED.
YOU MAY GET HURT--
or your family may get hurt.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN.
YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO TROY AND TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR FAMILY.


MY FATHER DIDN'T SAY A WORD TO ME ON THE RIDE BACK FROM THE BUS STATION, EITHER.


BUT THE NEXT MORNING THEY SAT ME DOWN FOR QUESTIONING, ASKING ME WHAT HAD HAPPENED THE PREVIOUS DAY.
I TOLD THEM.

AT FIRST THEY WANTED TO BE SUPPORTIVE. BUT THEY WERE AFRAID. NOT JUST FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR THOSE AROUND US, OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS.
THEY SAID THEY DIDN'T WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH FILING A SUIT AGAINST THE STATE OF ALABAMA. NOTHING. NOT ONE THING.

I WAS HEARTBROKEN, BUT IT WAS THEIR DECISION.

I WROTE DR. KING A LETTER EXPLAINING THAT I WOULD BE RETURNING TO NASHVILLE IN THE FALL.
LOOKING BACK, IT MUST'VE BEEN THE SPIRIT OF HISTORY TAKING HOLD OF MY LIFE--
BECAUSE IN NASHVILLE I'D MEET PEOPLE WHO OPENED MY EYES TO A SENSE OF VALUES THAT WOULD FOREVER DOMINATE MY MORAL-PHILOSOPHY--
THE WAY OF PEACE,
LEWIS
THE WAY OF LOVE,

THE WAY OF NON-VIOLENCE.
KNOCK KNOCK
COME IN?

SIR, IT'S TIME.

THANK YOU.

CONGRESSMAN LEWIS, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SPEAK WITH US TODAY.

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MUCH THIS MEANS TO ME AND--

BUMP!

BUMP!

thank you, John Lewis.

thank you, Mr. Lewis.

ANY TIME! YOU'RE WELCOME.

ROSA, THANK YOU FOR WAITING. HOW ARE YOU?
I'M GOOD, BOB. ARE YOU READY?
I'M READY.
CONGRESSMAN, BEFORE YOU GO, THERE'S A MESSAGE HERE.
IT'S FROM JIM LAWSON.

MARCH 26, 1958.
I WAS ATTENDING FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE.
YOU COULD LITERALLY STAND ON THE STEPS, THROW A BASEBALL, AND HIT THE STEPS OF THE TENNESSEE STATE CAPITOL.
A YOUNG MAN WILL BE JOINING US THIS EVENING, IF YOU'RE INTERESTED.
HE'LL BE CONDUCTING A WORKSHOP ON NON-VIOLENCE HERE AT FIRST BAPTIST--
HIS NAME IS JIM LAWSON.
THE CONGREGATION, LED BY KELLY MILLER SMITH, WERE BLACK BAPTISTS WHO'D LEFT THE WHITE CHURCH BECAUSE THEY HAD BEEN FORCED TO WORSHIP IN THE BALCONY.

I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST VOLUNTEERS TO ATTEND.

YES?

IT WASN'T A VERY LARGE MEETING. I WAS THE ONLY STUDENT TO GO FROM MY LITTLE SCHOOL.

THERE WERE YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE **DIANE NASH** FROM FISK UNIVERSITY. OTHERS CAME FROM MEHARRY MEDICAL COLLEGE AND TENNESSEE STATE.

AT THE TIME, JIM LAWSON WAS A GRADUATE STUDENT IN THE DIVINITY SCHOOL AT VANDERBILT.

HE ALSO REPRESENTED AN ORGANIZATION CALLED THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION, BETTER KNOWN AS F.O.R., A PACIFIST GROUP COMMITTED TO THE PHILOSOPHY AND DISCIPLINE OF NON-VIOLENCE.

F.O.R. HAD ALSO PUBLISHED A POPULAR COMIC BOOK CALLED MARTIN LUTHER KING AND THE MONTGOMERY STORY, WHICH EXPLAINED THE BASICS OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE AND NON-VIOLENT ACTION AS TOOLS FOR DESEGREGATION.

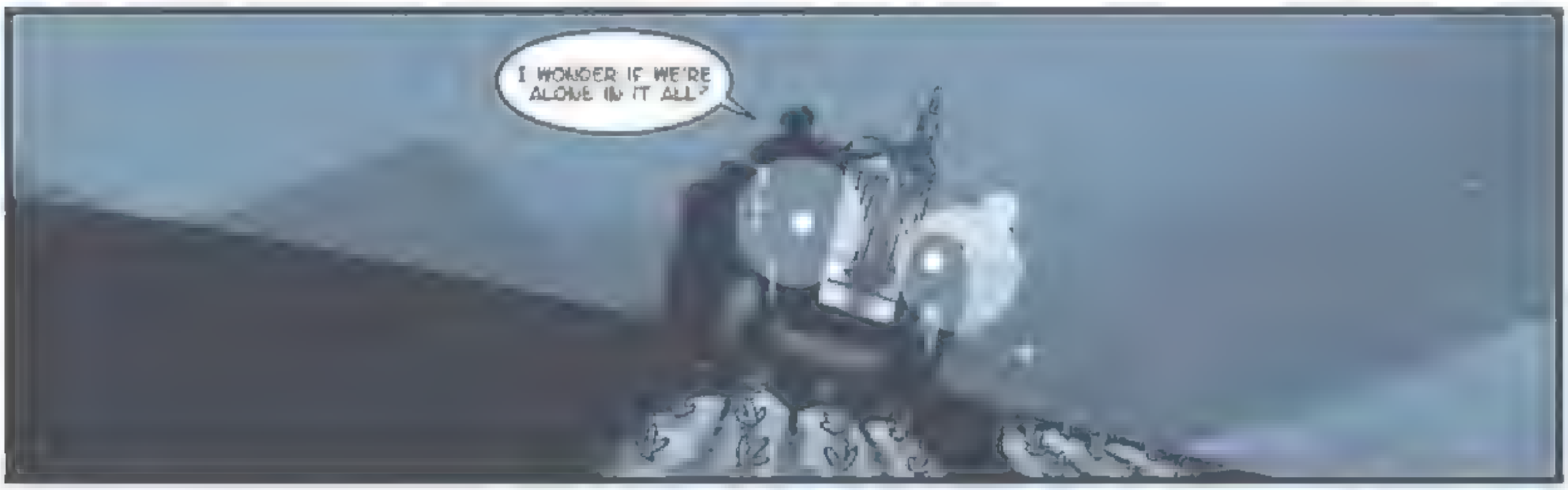
HER KING
AND
GOMERY
10¢
NEGROES
...W WAY TO
RACIAL
CRIMINATION

I WANT TO START WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, WITH STUDENTS-- HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS.

JIM TALKED ABOUT THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT,
ABOUT WAR RESISTANCE,
ABOUT NONVIOLENCE.
HE SPOKE OF GANDHI, THIS LITTLE BROWN MAN FROM INDIA USING THE WAY OF NONVIOLENCE TO FREE AN ENTIRE NATION OF PEOPLE.
AND HOW WE COULD APPLY NONVIOLENCE, JUST AS DR. KING DID IN MONTGOMERY, ALL ACROSS AMERICA -- SOUTH AND NORTH -- TO ERADICATE SOME OF THE EVILS WE ALL FACED:
THE EVIL OF RACISM,
THE EVIL OF POVERTY,
THE EVIL OF WAR.
JIM LAWSON CONVEYED THE URGENCY OF DEVELOPING OUR PHILOSOPHY, OUR DISCIPLINE, OUR UNDERSTANDING.

HIS WORDS LIBERATED ME.
I THOUGHT, THIS IS IT...
THIS IS THE WAY OUT.

SINCE DAWN'S CRACK HAS MAN LOOKED TO THE STARS IN WONDER
OFTEN POWDERING HIS INSIGNIFICANCE OVER A HOT BUTTERED CRUMPET.
ASKING THE ETERNAL QUESTION. ARE WE ALONE IN IT ALL?


I WONDER IF WE'RE ALONE IN IT ALL?

TODAY, DEAR FRIEND, TODAY HE FINDS OUT...

filmed in
EYEBALL-O-RAMA-VISION
iT CAME!
PLEEDIN 'ELL!
:DIRECTED BY:
D.BOULTWOOD, Esq.
:STARRING:
DICK CLAYMORE FANNY FLAUNDERS
BERTRUM CUMBERBUND SPENCER LACEY JOAN FETLOCK
FILMED AT PINETREE STUDIOS, ENGLAND

"COUGH"
"COUGH"

BLOODY HORA!

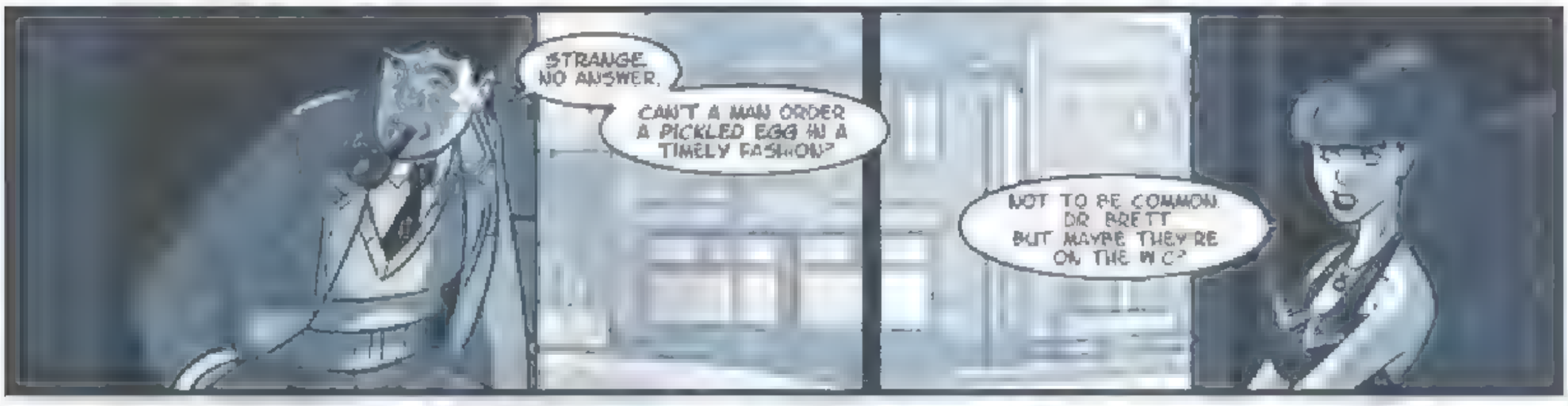
GRURK!

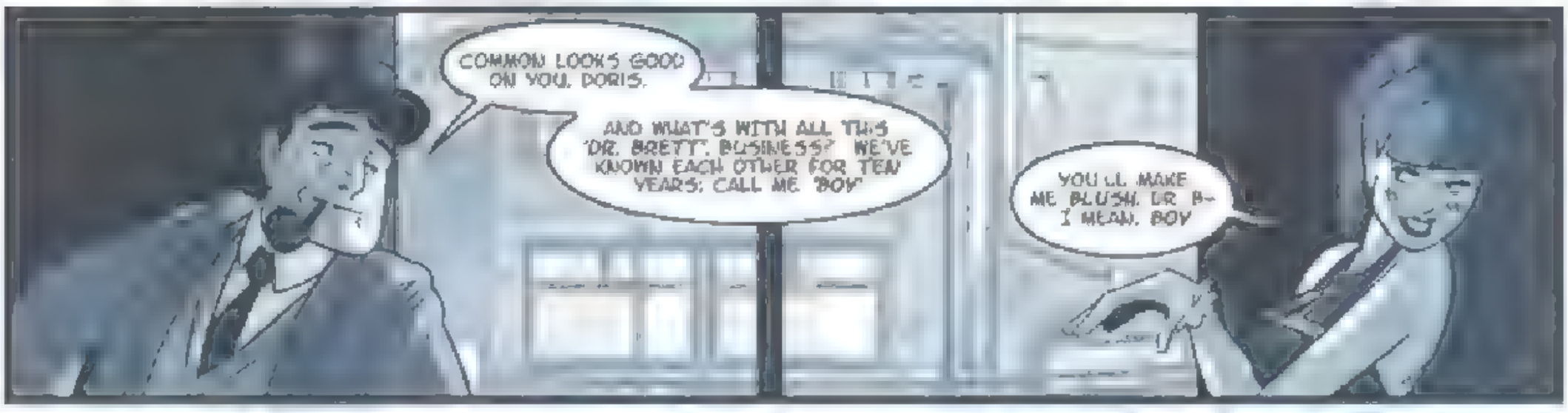
AAAAAAARGH!!

GRURK!

TWO DAYS LATER
SO YOU SEE, DORIS, THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF SOLAR SYSTEMS IN SPACE.
AND THEY ALL REVOLVE AROUND OUR SUN
WOW! I DIDN'T REALISE SPACE WAS BIG ENOUGH TO ACCOMMODATE ALL THOSE PLANETS OR BRETT!
IF THERE'S ONE THING YOU LEARN AT SPACE UNIVERSITY, DORIS IT'S THAT SPACE IS RATHER LARGE
OH, OR BRETT I SHALL SIMPLY NEVER BE THE GREAT SCIENTIFIC MIND WHICH YOU ARE
AND I'LL NEVER BE AS FEMININE AS YOU ARE, DORIS
RAF!
YOU KNOW DORIS?
FOR A GIRL, YOU'RE A GOOD EGG!
THIS LOOKS LIKE A LIKELY PLACE FOR A PLOUGHMAN'S

SCREECH
AH JUST THE TICKET!
AFTER ALL THIS MOTORING I COULD DO WITH A STIFF DRINK, DORIS
SORRY A STIFF WHAT!?
A DRINK, DORIS SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW IF YOUR MIND IS IN THE CLOUDS OR THE GUTTER?
WELL, I AM FROM TOTTENHAM, DR. BRETT
AND YOU'VE DONE VERY WELL DESPITE THAT
HELLO, SERVICE!?


STRANGE. NO ANSWER.
CAN'T A MAN ORDER A PICKLED EGG IN A TIMELY FASHION?
NOT TO BE COMMON, DR. BRETT BUT MAYBE THEY'RE ON THE W C?


COMMON LOOKS GOOD ON YOU, DORIS.
AND WHAT'S WITH ALL THIS 'DR. BRETT' BUSINESS? WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR TEN YEARS; CALL ME 'BOY'
YOU'LL MAKE ME BLUSH, DR B- I MEAN, BOY

PLEASANTRIES ASIDE, I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL IN THE AIR THAT SOMETHING QUEER IS ON THE HORIZON

I CAN'T QUITE PUT MY FINGER ON IT

LOOK I THINK THIS CHAP IS PEBBLE-DASHING THE CISTERN CHAPEL
WHAT SAY WE MAKE A MOVE?

IT WOULD BE QUICKER SERVICE TO DRIVE BACK TO MAYFAIR AND HAVE YOU MAKE US A ROUND OF SANDWICHES DORIS
YOU'VE NOT TOUCHED THAT PIANY I BOUGHT YOU FOR CHRISTMAS
IT IS EERILY QUIET, BOY IT'S GIVING ME THE WILLIES
THERE'S PROBABLY A VILLAGE FETE ON COUNTRY TYPES LIKE THAT SORT OF THING
I THINK IT'S SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE BUNTING
DORIS I NEED THAT FOR SAFE MOTORING
A GRL ALWAYS NEEDS TO LOOK HER BEST DR BRETT
YOU ARE LUCKY YOU'RE DECORATIVE DOR-
BY CRIKEY!

GRURK!
HANG ON, DORIS!
HMM?

SKREEEEEEEE!!

GRURK!?

THE WHITE HORSE

BOOM!

GOOD LORD...

BOY!? WHAT WAS ALL THAT ABOU-

GIANT-SIZE SIDEKICK

SPACE ROBOTS! DYING HEROES! CIVIL RIGHTS!

Welcome to your super-sized Sidekick, home of barbarians, cavemen and girls in pink bras!

Inside the seventh issue of your adventure-filled Giant-Size Sidekick...

This time around we're celebrating the launch of Titan Comics – the brand new line of original monthly comic books and classic graphic novel collections from one of Britain's most successful specialist publishers – with four (count 'em!) amazing extracts from the best of their first tranche of books. And leading the way: *Death Sentence*, an alternative take on superheroes where incredible powers are gifted to a bunch of young Londoners by the sexually transmitted G+ Virus, but the downsides are severe – not least that they've now only got six months to live!

Also in this issue:
Two classic comic series are collected by Titan in September, and we've extracts from both: Jack Katz's '70s classic *The First Kingdom* tells of a post-apocalyptic future where primitive man struggles to rebuild civilisation, while in Carl Critchlow's *Thrud The Barbarian* we've a rather simpler tale of beer, babes, and bashing heads. Plus, there's the opening sequence from another original Titan series, *It Came!*, and an exclusive extract from *March*, a new graphic novel written by American Congressman John Lewis.

Death Sentence
The First Kingdom
Thrud The Barbarian
March: Book One
It Came!

9001